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Student Writing in Social Work Education

Doctorate of Philosophy

Education

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences of a group of social work students undertaking assessed academic writing as part of their professional training through distance learning in the UK in 2001. Drawing upon the concept of 'academic literacies' and informed by a psychosocial approach, this thesis explores the nature of students' writing within the context of the experiences of students and tutors.

Writing in social work requires students to include reflections on personal experience and values. Due to this personal aspect of writing in social work, I have taken a particular interest in the relationship between identity and writing. In doing so I draw upon current research based upon sociological perspectives on writer identity but also critically examine the potential contribution of concepts from what I will generally be referring to as a 'psychosocial' approach, which incorporates elements of psychology and psychoanalysis alongside a sociological world view. In particular I explore the ways in which a psychosocial approach to writer identity can inform our understanding of writing practices surrounding the creation of student texts in higher education.

My central argument is that academic writing in social work poses a particular challenge to student writers and their tutors due to its lack of transparency and the degree of self-disclosure required of authors. This thesis shows that, in common with higher education more generally writing conventions in social work are frequently implicit and contradictory. Additionally, the integration of

personal experiences and values with theoretical discussion poses significant difficulties for students and tutors. Such 'self-disclosure' has implications which become evident when applying a psychosocial perspective to writer identity. I draw together these implications in relation to three features of writing practices, namely emotion, circularity, and human interaction. Emotion in this context refers to the emotion both experienced by students whilst writing texts and responding to feedback on them. This involves a circular process based upon not only the students' actions but also their interaction with others, primarily the tutor. I conclude by offering some pedagogical implications and suggesting some future research arising from this thesis.

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Key to styles used in data extracts

1. Extract from student interview

Second extract from student interview, interviewee 'Sally'

S2: Sally interview: xth Month Year

2. Extract from telephone conference interview

Extract from tutor conference

Tutor 5

3. Extract from written tutor comment

Extract from written tutor comment

Tutor 4 commenting on assignment x

4. Extract from written course guidance

Extract from written course guidance

Practice learning guide

5. Extract from student text

Well, you have just read the account of my first day in the caring profession, which was eight years ago, but I can still recall it as if it had happened last week.

Pamela Practice learning course assignment 2

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1. Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will outline my motivations for undertaking the research upon which this thesis is based, highlighting the significance of my own teaching and learning experiences as well as my professional background in social work. I will identify the aims of the thesis and explain the process of developing my final set of research questions which have driven my investigation. I have drawn significantly upon a body of work sharing a concern with 'academic literacies' and I will briefly introduce this approach to studying academic writing. Focusing specifically on professional academic writing undertaken by social work academics and practitioners, I will summarise a debate which illustrates some of the issues which contribute to the contested nature of academic writing in social work, in particular the unusually central place of the self in writing. Finally I will provide a brief summary of the specific focus of the study undertaken, including outlining the programme of study and sources of data used.

This thesis explores the experiences of social work students engaged in academic writing undertaken as part of their professional training through distance learning in the UK in 2001. Drawing upon literature from the fields of academic literacy, the study of identity and academic writing in social work, I hope to contribute to our understanding of the specific nature of assessed academic writing undertaken by social work students. In doing so, I also aim to expand established sociologically orientated theories of writer identity

(Clark and Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Ivanič, 2006), through a consideration of the potential contribution of perspectives from psychology and psychoanalysis.

1.1.1 The origins of my research interest: Why student writing in social work education?

This thesis has its roots in my experiences as a learner, social worker and most recently as a social work educator, where my interest in academic writing initially arose. The research on which this thesis is based evolved from my reflections upon student experiences and my attempts to support students to develop their writing skills. In particular I became aware of the challenge faced by student social workers undertaking a specific form of writing often referred to as 'reflective writing', in the context of assessed academic assignments. By reflective writing I am referring broadly to writing in which the author uses their own experiences and reflections upon these experiences as the focus for writing. In social work, such writing requires the author to place their own experiences and values at the heart of their writing, a practice which appears out of place within the context of much academic assessment.

What follows is an example of reflective writing which is broadly representative of writing required of social work students. In this section I explore the journey that led me to undertaking this thesis. This is relevant as my specific approach and skills have been strongly influenced by my extensive involvement in the discourses of the social work profession, where I trained and worked as a qualified social work practitioner for ten years prior to entering higher education.

1.1.2 My roots in social work: psychoanalytic perspectives

My immersion in the particular discourses of social work began during my childhood when I was influenced by my mother's profession as a social worker and my father's as a general practitioner and psychiatrist. My parents' work lives resulted in our home life being influenced by psychoanalytic discourses which, as a young adult, I took very much for granted. I only became conscious of the origins of these discourses through academic study, where I came across ideas in books that I already understood as common sense truths. As an undergraduate student I enjoyed exploring ideas and perspectives that were new and unfamiliar as well as critically re-examining psychoanalytic perspectives. This process has enabled me to modify and extend my world view (Payne, 1990) of social and human interaction but I still retain many foundational principles which I believe originated in my childhood and young adulthood and these have influenced my work as a social worker, my training choices, teaching experience and ultimately my research into writing.

After working for ten years as a social worker I moved into higher education, primarily teaching social work students. I worked initially in a college of further education and subsequently in a large distance learning university. At both of these institutions I worked primarily with students who could be described as 'non traditional' (Lillis, 2001), mature women learners, many from lower social economic groups and some of black and minority ethnic heritage. I also took a particular interest in supporting students with expressed difficulties with academic writing, offering both additional workshops and individual sessions. As a result of working with these students, I became aware of difficulties

experienced by many writers (evidenced by lower grades, frequency of re-sits and student testimony) with a particular form of assessed academic writing in which there was a requirement to integrate discussion of students' own practice experience and self-reflection with theory.

In approaching this study I am aware that I have been influenced by aspects of my identity rooted in my disciplinary and vocational interests, stemming from social work and adult education, as outlined above. In addition, my personal experiences or identity beyond my work roles have also influenced both the inspiration for and conduct of my thesis. For example, I am a woman and a mother of dual heritage children. I have grown up primarily within 'middle class' social surroundings with financial privileges based in central England, but influenced by my heritage of Scots/Irish Protestant ship builders/teachers and Quaker grandparents. These aspects of who I am have influenced my own identity in many ways, including the sense that I live (temporarily?) in the 'foreign' culture of England despite the fact that I have never lived anywhere else. The addition of Nepal to our family heritage has accentuated this sense of our culture and heritage residing somewhere within ourselves rather than in the place where we live, and being expressed through language, music, images, memories and common understandings of ways of being.

In writing this thesis I am also influenced by my own experiences of education as a child. My consistent experience throughout school was as a 'could do really well if she tried' – B+ child. This faint praise had a significant impact on me. Despite my apparent lack of will to do well, I moved through school

exams, on to higher education and into professional social work, in my mind scraping through at each hurdle. The impact of critical comments about my writing has been at the core of my educational experience and has never disappeared. I did have a will to do well but I carried with me the assumption that my 'poor spelling', much criticised by my teachers regardless of the quality of the work in other respects, must be indicative of my abilities, despite the fact that it was a limitation shared with both parents (although my father still found his way to study medicine at Cambridge University), my sister and now one of my sons. As an adult, I can look back on my childhood efforts and see that criticism of my spelling by teachers dominated my perception of myself as a participant in learning and resulted in me internalising a view of myself as 'non academic'. I can also contrast this with my son's experience, who although he is in a lower set for spelling, excels in all his other subjects and receives deserved praise for his abilities from his teachers as well as support with his spelling.

Regardless of whether my poor spelling resulted from genetics, poor teaching or lack of application on my part, the emotional and cognitive impact of never apparently doing myself justice has stayed with me. This experience resonated as I worked alongside my first group of social work students, all sharing a black Caribbean heritage and all, apparently, experiencing difficulties with academic English. I have been lucky. A computer spell checker has enabled me to participate in higher education as a learner, educator and researcher – or maybe I just started to 'try harder'. Puzzling over the reasons for the common difficulties amongst the group of Jamaican heritage students with whom I was working did not seem to offer such a

simple solution, since they struggled not only with spellings which were not consistent with their colloquial speech but also with an unfamiliar grammar rooted in a form of English that they neither grew up nor lived with outside of the world of work and the university.

These are just a very few aspects of who I am, but they are important here in that they represent a history which has resulted in my participation in a particular set of discourses relating to student writing. This history is the source of my identification with the subject of the study, the formulation of my research questions, methodology, and analysis. My academic perspective has been influenced by my disciplinary orientation and interest in psychoanalytic ideas. My motivation to research students' experiences of academic writing has been motivated by both my own experiences as a writer and those of students with whom I have worked. 'Who I am' and the way in which I have presented myself have also had an impact upon the participants and their contributions to the study.

The reflections offered here, whilst being personally uncomfortable, illustrate some of the requirements of reflective writing in social work education at university. The 'self' is drawn into academic study and writing to a degree which is unusual within the spectrum of academic writing. The identity of the writer therefore becomes central as both the subject of discussion and the originator of the reflection (Salmon, 1989; Brockbank and McGill, 1998).

1.2 The aims of the thesis

1.2.1 The self in academic social work writing

The primary aim of this thesis is to offer an insight into the experiences of student social workers participating in an example of practice-based academic writing. Social work as a discipline places the self at the centre of much student learning, including academic writing. This disciplinary valuing of the self has implications for academic writing in social work education. It also raises questions about the way in which academic writing in social work might be out of step with academic writing in the academy and therefore presents significant difficulties for both students and tutors.

Although there has not been a debate in the UK about the implications of placing the self at the centre of academic student writing in social work, there has been considerable academic interest in reflection as a tool of assessment and learning within social work and in related practice-based disciplines (Boud et al., 1985; Boud, 1999; Moon, 1999a; Winter et al., 1999; Creme, 2000; Hoadley-Maidment, 2000; Stierer, 2000; Moon, 2002; Moon, 2004; Creme, 2005). Reflective practice has a long-standing position in social work education, evolving from concepts such as the use of self (O'Connor et al., 2006) and the internal supervisor (Smith, 2005). The curriculum and assessment of social work in England, under the regulation of the Central

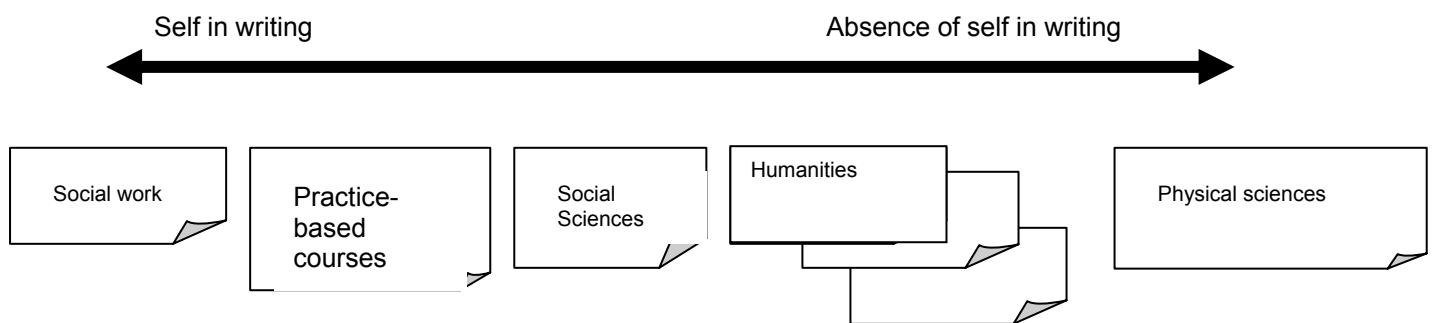
Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW)¹ and more recently under the General Social Care Council², specifically identifies reflection as an essential component of professional training (CCETSW, 1996; Department of Health, 2002). The assessment of reflective practice requires students not only to draw upon their personal values and past experiences but also to make links with relevant theoretical knowledge. This is a complex process which not only challenges students' cognitive skills but involves sharing of personal experiences and insight. Boud (1999) suggested that the specific nature of reflection could pose particular challenges when drawn into the arena of assessment due to inherent contradictions (discussed below in 2.5.1) and that the use of reflection in assessment should be treated with great caution (Boud, 1999, p.123). Despite these contradictions, the assessment of reflective practice in social work education is required and is also assessed.

¹ The Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers was the body responsible for social work education in England prior to the General Social Care Council.

² Regulations for assessment have changed since the beginning of this study. During this study the duties of CCETSW were taken over by separate training councils in each of the countries of the UK, overseen by the General Social Care Council. References here are to the regulations as they stood for students registered on Diploma in Social Work programmes in 2001, before CCETSW was disestablished.

The centrality of the self to academic student writing in social work is particularly significant because such a focus places it out of step with the wider academy. In the following Figure I present a notional spectrum of expectations in relation to the explicit presence of the self in academic student writing:

Figure 1 Writing about self across a notional spectrum of academic disciplines



There are many ways in which the self may appear in a text; within social work the writer is expected to include accounts of and reflections on both personal experience and experience deriving from practice. In addition students are required to explore their own personal values in relation to professional values laid down in the Code of Practice applicable to social workers (Department of Health, 2002). I refer to the inclusion of personal information involving the self in texts as 'self-disclosure'. In 2.7 I will be exploring the implications for students and tutors of this unusually high demand for self-disclosure within the context of academic assessed writing.

1.2.2 Developing a model of writer identity

In this thesis I have drawn upon Ivanič (Clark and Ivanic, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Ivanič, 2006). This research on writer identity in academic writing has drawn

primarily upon sociologically orientated perspectives of identity. Although such models have provided an important starting point for this study, I have found that the lack of a more psychologically orientated perspective on identity has limited the value of these models particularly in the task of exploring key aspects of the self such as the unconscious and emotion. In this thesis I consider the potential contribution of concepts drawn from the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis. For example, I have drawn upon the work of Hunt and Sampson (2006) who have theorised writer identity in the context of creative writing using work from a range of disciplines including cognitive psychology, psychoanalysis and philosophy. A full discussion of writer identity, which underpins this thesis, is provided in chapter 3.

1.3 The research questions

The research questions informing this thesis have arisen from a combination of my experiences as a social work educator, as outlined above, and a study of literature relating to academic writing. I began with observations and concerns arising from my teaching practice and developed the following hypotheses:

1. There are significant differences in the requirements of student academic writing between courses within a single social work programme such as the one studied.
2. The specific nature of the writing task influences both the way in which students engage with academic writing and also the feedback dialogue between tutor and student.

3. The identity of student and tutor are important factors in student writing

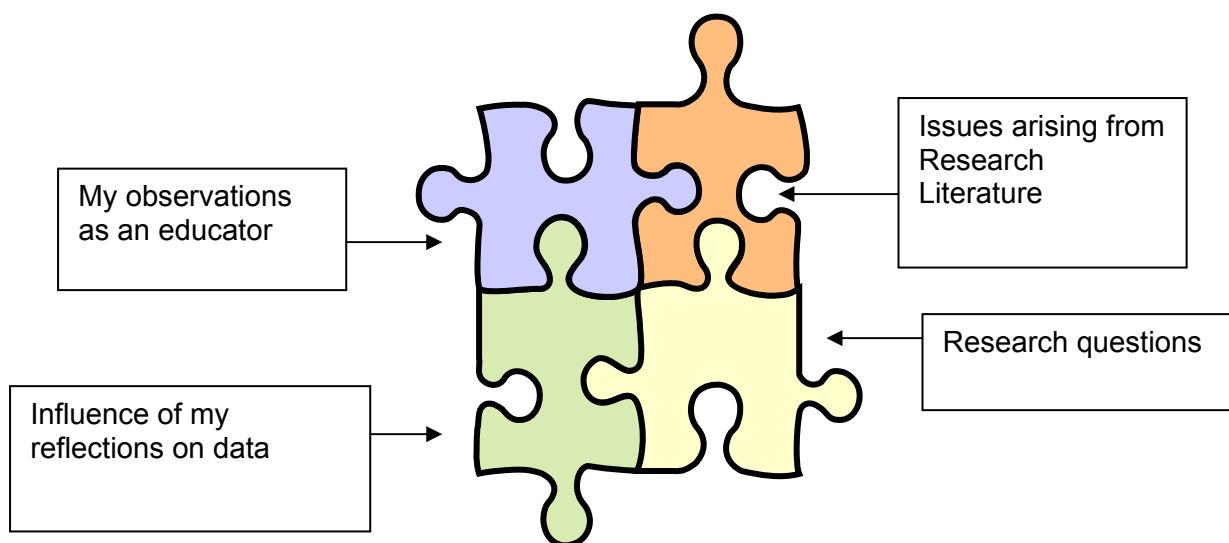
I based my original research questions closely upon these hypotheses, focusing quite broadly upon the concepts of 'experience' and 'identity':

In the context of a distance learning social work education programme:

1. What are the requirements and expectations of different kinds of student writing?
2. How do prior experiences (personal and educational) impact on the experience and practice of student writing?
3. How do student and tutor identities influence different kinds of student writing?

My first set of interviews with students were based around these research questions and explored participants' initial experiences writing in an academic context. From this initial exploration, together with an analysis of assignment and writing guidance provided to students in relation to each course of study and my continued reading in the field of academic literacies, I became concerned about the usefulness of my original formulation of the research questions. I found that I needed to refine them in response to my developing a deeper understanding of the significance of experience and self in writing. The experiences shared in the first set of student interviews proved to be key to understanding the ways in which students responded to the writing tasks. Figure 2 illustrates the influences which led me to my final set of research questions.

Figure 2: The process of determining the final research questions



The final research questions were therefore:

In the context of a distance learning social work education programme
(specifically the programme studied):

What differences exist in the requirements and expectations of different kinds
of assessed student texts written by students, such as reflective writing and
the form of applied social science essay?

How does the specific nature of the writing task influence students' and tutors'
engagement with academic writing?

How does student identity influence the experience and practice of different
kinds of student writing?

1.4 Academic literacies

This thesis is concerned with writing, specifically academic student writing. In
exploring the experiences of students engaged in writing within social work I

have drawn upon a body of work which has been concerned with 'academic literacies'. This body of work includes research on disciplinarity, or in other words the ways in which academic disciplines have developed particular expectations of writing which reflect internal discourses and functions of writing (Lea and Street, 1998; Prior, 1998). Disciplinarity is closely associated with the concept of 'academic literacies' (Lea and Street, 1998) which recognises not only the diversity of writing requirements across disciplines, but the extent to which such writing practices are local to institutions, courses and even individual tutors. An academic literacies approach recognises academic writing as a 'social' practice, or an activity embedded in social and interpersonal ways of being (Bazerman, 1981; Bazerman, 1988; Lea and Stierer eds, 2000; Bazerman and Prior, 2004). This work attaches particular importance, therefore, to the influence of social, institutional and interpersonal *contexts* within which writing acts take place. This body of work includes research which explores the notion of the 'non traditional student' (Lillis, 1997; Lillis, 2001; Lillis and Turner, 2001; Lillis, 2003) and introduces ideas about inequalities of access to privileged knowledge and skills. This work suggests that students' choices are influenced by their self-positioning in relation to higher education institutions and their studies, and those aspects of identity such as social class, ethnicity, religion and gender are influential on their writing. Lillis (2001) also makes an important contribution in relation to the 'meaning making' of students and the ways in which they negotiate what she terms the 'institutional practice of mystery' (Lillis, 2001, p. 76) to encapsulate the ways in which the expectations of academic writing can be experienced as both confusing and obscure.

This study is particularly concerned with research drawing upon an approach to academic writing which has focused on writer and reader identity (Clark and Ivanic, 1997; Ivanič, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Ivanič, 2006). This work will be explored in some detail in chapter 3, as writer identity has a particular significance for the reflective writing tasks required of social work students. Research on writer identity in higher education has focused primarily on sociological perspectives on identity and the ways in which their different aspects of social identity are represented in texts. Drawing upon this model, this thesis also explores the potential contribution of 'psychosocial' perspectives on identity. This approach draws together post-structural perspectives on society and selected concepts from psychology and psychoanalysis, as represented by Frosh (1991; 2002) and Henriques et al. (1998). These works provide opportunities to examine the emotional and unconscious aspects of identity.

1.5 Student writing in social work

Social work students are required to write for various purposes during their studies. These purposes include writing undertaken in practice, such as recording contact with service users, court reports or assessment documentation. This 'professional writing' is indirectly assessed in the practice setting as part of students' overall competence as a practitioner. In addition, students undertake writing which is more directly assessed and is undertaken within the context of academic learning in the university. Such writing also varies and may include reflective reports, timed examinations, journals and various types of writing intended to demonstrate a student's ability to

demonstrate knowledge and the ability to construct an argument. This ability is frequently tested through what is commonly referred to as the essay, based upon conventions derived from academic writing in the social sciences. For the purposes of this thesis I will be referring to all writing undertaken in the context of the university as 'academic student writing'. I will refer to writing undertaken by practitioners and academics (as opposed to students) and published in academic journals or professional periodicals as 'academic writing'.

Practice-based higher education commonly requires students to undertake forms of academic student writing which involve reflection and analysis of practice experiences (Baynham, 2000; Hoadley-Maidment, 2000; Stierer, 2000). As such, some of the academic student writing on practice-based courses involves a relatively high degree of involvement of the author's self in the text, see Figure 1 above. Social work education has a requirement to reflect not only on practice but also on personal experience, including personal and professional values. This requirement derived from the guidance of the body which regulated the award of the Diploma in Social Work at the time of the study, CCETSW. CCETSW required all Diploma in Social Work programmes to assess students in a 'significant' piece of writing which relates theory to practice (Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers 1995). In this piece of writing students were required to:

'demonstrate that they have ... reflected upon and critically analysed their practice' (CCETSW, 1995)

It is this requirement which underpins what I will be referring to as the 'reflective writing' required of students. The emphasis on reflective writing in

social work education continues in the current professional qualifying award, the Degree in Social Work. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) set academic benchmark standards in 2000 which form part of the framework documents upon which the curriculum and standards for qualification are set. This document re-states the relevance of an extended piece of reflective writing and emphasises the importance of students developing cognitive skills in integrating theory, values and practice (QAA, 2000). Reflective writing involves particular features which students can find difficult to address, the reasons for which will be the focus of further discussion throughout this thesis.

1.6 Professional academic writing in social work: a contested practice

My research has focused specifically on student writing in social work. The specific nature of academic writing undertaken by social work students has received little scholarly attention and where it has, this has been in the context of the challenges it poses to students (Simon and Soven, 1989; Waller, 1996; Waller, 2000; Alter and Adkins, 2001; Watson, 2002). The centrality of the self and reflection is not restricted to writing undertaken by *student* social workers. The following review of literature relates to writing undertaken by social work academics and practitioners and illustrates the contested nature of published academic writing in social work. This is relevant to this thesis because such writing has much in common with the academic writing undertaken by social work students both in terms of the content (reflective writing drawing on

practice and personal values) and the challenges posed by applying expected conventions to such content.

Professional academic writing undertaken by social work practitioners and academics has attracted some scholarly debate (Berger, 1990; Goldstein, 1993; Kirk, 1993; Austin and McClelland, 1998; Green, 1998; Rehr et al., 1998; Bibus et al., 1999; Sherman, 1999; Tasker, 1999; Witkin, 2000; Dinerman, 2003; Staudt et al., 2003; Heron and Murray, 2004; Waldman, 2005). This literature, which is primarily in the form of editorials or reflections on personal or institutional practices, focuses on questioning publishing patterns and the appropriateness of the style required by social work academic journals. One of the purposes of academic publication in social work is to disseminate best practice both to inform practitioners and also to develop policy relating to the provision of services. Concern over the capability of publications to achieve this outcome has stimulated debate both about the suitability of the genre encouraged by peer-reviewed journals and also questioning whether publication is accessible to practitioners both as authors and readers. Concern has also been expressed that the genre of writing required by peer reviewed-journals may be distorting the areas of practice which are discussed and influencing the practitioners who have their voices heard. Such implicit regulation has consequences for which practitioners from particular sectors of the social work profession can influence policy development through publication.

Heron and Murray (2004) writing in the UK and Rehr et al., (1998) writing in the US both focus on difficulties surrounding practitioners publishing and

investigate some possible barriers to writing. In the UK Heron suggests that these include issues of identity and a lack of confidence around writing for academic journals whilst Rehr et al., (1998) identify a problematic divide in the US between both the form of writing undertaken by academics and practising social workers and the sites of publication. Rehr et al., (1988) suggest that where practitioners are publishing, it is overlooked by academics due to the specialist sites of publication. Heron and Murray (2004) suggest the voices of some practitioners, in particular residential workers, are marginalised as they are less likely to publish in part due to a lack of identification with the academic world, and in part due to a lack of confidence or ability arising from the vocational education route followed by most residential workers. The Authors suggest that these workers have a particular perspective on practice to offer but do not inhabit either a role or context which would promote academic writing and thus influence policy development. Rehr et al., (1998), also concerned with marginalised practitioner voices, suggest that the academic –practitioner divide in the US has arisen as a result of a split between ‘practice wisdom’ and ‘scientific technologies’. The authors suggest that this split should be redressed in order to enhance the quality of practice.

They (practitioners) feel further dismissed when they see their own published work ignored by academics whilst being admonished for not writing. (Rehr et al., 1998, pp87)

Tasker (1999), Berger (1990) and Kirsner and Lethenborg (1994) share the view that writing for publication is a task which creates anxiety for practitioners and that strategies are needed to build confidence. Tasker (1999) shares her own experiences of writing for publication as a practitioner in the US and

offers practical advice such as allowing a creative and unstructured preparatory stage which leads to producing writing. Berger (1990) identifies problems associated with social workers getting published in the US and promotes mentoring schemes between practitioners and academics. Along a similar line, in Australia Kirsner and Lethenborg (1994) suggest that anxiety about writing, together with a lack of confidence in what they have to say, deters practitioners from publishing. The authors suggest that this can be addressed in part by a 'writer in residence', or experienced writer working alongside practitioners to help them translate their reflections into publishable texts.

Kirk (1993) challenges the quality of academic publications written by social work academics or practitioners and suggests (possibly optimistically) that this problem is *easily remedied*. (Kirk, 1993, p. 3). Some of Kirk's proposals appear to rely on a common-sense approach to writing which focuses primarily upon the surface features of writing (such as spelling, vocabulary and punctuation). For example he advocates the use of clear writing, which follows established guidelines for 'good writing', avoidance of jargon and careful and consistent use of specialist terminology and acronyms and varying the sentence and paragraph length. Kirk's advice moves on, however, to include an awareness of audience and advice on voice and the use of the first person. Kirk suggests that in social work the use of the first person is often appropriate and that the more conventional use of the third person can be unhelpful as it places the reader at a distance. Kirk suggests that authors can establish a more personal voice by drawing upon their own experience in relation to research and by using the active rather than the passive voice (see

6.5) for a more extensive discussion of the use of first person singular pronouns). In suggesting that a more personal voice may make social work publications more accessible, Kirk appears to be encouraging a departure from a formal, impersonal academic genre favoured by many journals. This body of work from the US and the UK suggests, therefore, that the participation of practitioners in journal publications is important, but that as a result of the genre of writing required by academic journals, such participation is being limited with negative consequences for practice and policy development.

Witkin (2000) explores the appropriateness of the article genre for social work writing. He distinguishes broadly between writing for the arts and humanities, where the concern is with language as a tool for expression, analysis and creativity, and that of science where he argues it is:

Simply a vehicle for recording the regularities of nature and the methods for reproducing those regularities. (Witkin, 2000, p. 389).

Witkin suggests that social work has generally followed a tradition of writing prescribed by most scientific and professional journals and raises concerns about the consequent limitations placed on professional academic writing in social work. Billig (1994) suggests the 'APA' style, favoured by such journals can unhelpfully create 'depopulated texts', or texts with neither authors nor subjects, and is objective and presented as 'neutral', although inherently value-laden. The APA style he refers to here is an influential set of primarily editorial guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association. Billig's view of the APA genre is not universally held within social work education. Szuchman and Thomlinson (2004), writing primarily for those

studying in the US, urge social work students to learn and practice the APA genre which they suggest not only prepares them for publishing in journals but also for writing their academic assignments and writing effectively in the context of their practice (Szuchman and Thomlinson, 2004, p. 5). Whilst Szuchman and Thomlinson present the APA genre as requiring formality and avoiding bias, they do not veto the use of the first person and warn against an over use of the passive voice (Szuchman and Thomlinson, 2004, p. 23).

Witkin offers the personal essay as an alternative to more positivist forms of writing, suggesting that rather than a dispassionate reporting from invisible authors, the essay is a narrative in which the authorial presence is integral to the story being told (Witkin, 2000, p. 391). Quoting Lopate (1994) he suggests that in the personal essay:

Personal disclosures form the basis of a relationship between authors and readers. (Lopate, 1994 quoted in Witkin, 2000, p. 390)

Goldstein (1993) also supports a greater authorial presence in social work writing, suggesting that, as social work is concerned with 'the person in the situation' (Goldstein, 1993, p. 441), scientifically orientated genres common in academic journals (which are typically formal and abstract) can be unsuitable. He appears to agree with Witkin in suggesting that there are elements of the genre of the essay which provide more possibilities for social work writing. In promoting the use of the 'essay' Goldstein refers to the value of narrative or first person account as preferable to neat but depersonalised apparently 'objective' accounts where form dictates content and the author's identity is obscured, depriving the writing of context or perspective. In doing so the narrative '*draws together the aesthetics of the humanities and the intellect of*

science' (Goldstein, 1993, p. 441). Goldstein suggests that moving away from the controlled scholarly genre of the research article may encourage more practitioners to participate in academic writing. Despite the time separating their publication, Heron and Murray (2004), Kirk (1993), Witkin (2000) and Goldstein (1993) show striking consistency in their views about features of a more facilitative approach to writing in social work to encourage publication and express the discipline authentically. Such a genre would include space for narrative and for the identity of both the writer and other participants in the text to be visible. It would create a space for creativity and reflection, avoiding formal, positivist approaches to knowledge formation.

The critical evaluation of genre, illustrated in relation to publication in academic journals, has not taken place in relation to student academic writing in social work. The debate presented here does, however, raise issues which are also represented in this thesis. For example the relevance of identity (which is the focus of chapter 3) and emotion, specifically anxiety, raised by Berger (1990) and Kirsner and Lethenborg (1994) which is discussed in 3.8 and 8.3.2.1.

1.7 Social work education in the UK

Social work education has always been, and is still, a qualification delivered jointly by higher education institutions and social work agencies. These agencies have a responsibility to provide practice learning placements where students develop their practice skills and are assessed in practice. Up until 2003, the professional qualification for social work was the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW). Since 2003 the DipSW has been gradually replaced by a

degree in social work which is now the required qualification leading to professional registration with the General Social Care Council in England and the respective Social Care and Social Services Councils in the nations of the UK. Students who studied the DipSW in the UK, as with the current degree in social work, undertook a professional higher education qualification which had common national criteria for the assessment of competence. Successful completion of professional social work training both then and now involves studying academic units and also assessed practice placements under the supervision of qualified social workers. The length of these placements, criteria for assessment and also the curriculum for the academic units are nationally prescribed. The DipSW had two points of assessment, stage one and two, each associated with a practice learning placement. On a full time programme each stage would be undertaken in one academic year. Students were required to pass 'intermediate assessment' at the end of stage one before commencing the stage two courses or the final practice learning placement. The degree in social work has adopted similar practices, although students study over 3 years and have 2 points of 'intermediate assessment' which, when passed, enable them to progress. The data on which this thesis is based was drawn from students undertaking the DipSW, but the findings apply equally to the current degree in social work due to the similarities in the nature of the discipline.

1.7.1 Social work students in the UK

The profile of students undertaking social work education suggests that they are strongly representative of students described as 'non traditional' (Bowl, 2000; Lillis, 2001; Bowl, 2002). Based upon University and College

Admissions Service (UCAS) statistics on entrants to training in 2000, the period relevant to my study, social work students are mature (over 25), more likely to be women and more likely to have either no prior qualifications or else vocational/access qualifications such as GNVQs, BTEC/SCOTVEC and HNC/Ds or access to higher education awards. (University and College Admissions Service, 2003)

1.7.1.1 Gender, age, qualifications and ethnicity

When social work entrants are compared with the national average generally and also with two other vocationally orientated higher education courses, Law and Teaching, marked differences in student profiles are apparent. Social work students in 2000 had a higher representation of over 25 year olds than trainee teachers (secondary school) and a significantly higher representation than for law degree applicants. This imbalance was however influenced by the fact that Diploma in Social Work students in the UK were not entitled to embark on training before the age of 20 at the time of the study. This age restriction was lifted with the introduction of a social work degree in 2003, school leavers with little or no practice experience being positively encouraged to enter social work. Statistics for 2006, however, show a *decrease* of 10% in entrants aged 25 or under. Social work entrants, therefore, are not only more likely to be mature students however; they are also mostly women. In 2000 only 15% of all places offered on social work programmes in the UK were offered to men. This is significantly more than Law and Teaching (University and College Admissions Service, 2003). The following tables illustrate the national profile of entrants to social work, teaching and law broken down by age (Figure 3) and gender (Figure 4).

Social work has a significantly higher number of mature female entrants than teaching or law. The profile of social work students in 2006 (other than in relation to age) have not changed significantly:

Figure 3 Breakdown of entrants to training for social work, teaching and law by age 2000

| Age group | Social work | Teaching (secondary school) | Law | Average of all courses surveyed by UCAS |
|--------------------|--------------------|--|------------|--|
| Under 25 | 47% | 76% | 90% | 88.5% |
| 25 and Over | 53% | 24% | 10% | 11.5% |

Source: (University and College Admissions Service, 2003)

The profile of social work entrants has not changed significantly since 2000 with the exception that

Figure 4 Breakdown of entrants to training for social work, teaching and law by gender

| Gender | Social work | Teaching (secondary school) | Law | Average of all Courses surveyed by UCAS |
|---------------|--------------------|--|------------|--|
| Male | 15% | 39% | 37% | 47% |
| Female | 85% | 61% | 63% | 53% |

Source: (University and College Admissions Service, 2003)

In terms of prior academic study, fewer social work students in 2000 began training with A levels, Scottish highers or higher education qualifications and were more likely to have vocational qualifications such as GNVQs, BTEC/SCOTVEC and HNC/Ds or to have undertaken access programmes specifically designed for mature returnees to study. The following table divides entrants into two groups, those with A level, Scottish Highers and higher

education qualifications (group 1) and those with other or no qualifications (group 2):

Figure 5 Breakdown of entrants to training for social work, teaching and law by prior qualifications

| Qualification Group | Social work | Teaching (secondary school) | Law | All Courses surveyed by UCAS |
|--|--------------------|------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 With A level, Scottish Highers and higher education qualifications | 18.4% | 56.3% | 81.7% | 67% |
| 2 With other or no qualifications | 81.6% | 43.7% | 18.3% | 33% |

Source: (University and College Admissions Service, 2003)

Based upon statistical information from UCAS, therefore, a profile emerges of the majority of social work students being mature women who are returning to education via access courses or vocational qualifications. Social work students also have a slightly higher representation of Black³ and significantly higher representation of 'unknown' ethnic groups. Asian⁴ students are slightly under-represented compared with the national average of all higher education

³ 'Black' here is used to combine the three self-selecting categories used by UCAS of black-Caribbean, black-African and black-other.

⁴ 'Asian' here is used to combine the four self-selecting categories used by UCAS of Asian-Indian, Asian-Pakistani, Asian-Chinese and Asian-other.

students. This profile matches closely that of students described as ‘non traditional’ in terms of gender and ethnicity (see discussion in 1.2.1).

Figure 6 Breakdown of entrants to training for social work, teaching and law by self-declared ethnicity

| | Social work | Teaching (secondary school) | Law | All Courses surveyed by UCAS |
|---------|--------------------|--|------------|---|
| White | 72% | 90% | 71% | 78% |
| Black | 7% | 3% | 5% | 3% |
| Asian | 6.5% | 1% | 14% | 10% |
| Other | 2% | 1% | 2% | 2% |
| Unknown | 12.5% | 5% | 6% | 7% |

Source: (University and College Admissions Service, 2003)

1.7.1.2 Social Class

The final important category is social class. Despite the relevance of social class to this study, the statistical data available has made it difficult to draw any conclusions about the profile of social work students in relation to social class. Social class is measured in the national statistics (University and College Admissions Service, 2003) by income group. In 2000, UCAS used the Standard Occupational Classification 1990, in assigning socio-economic status based on the entrant's parental occupation (or the occupation of the person contributing the highest income to the household if the applicant is aged 21 years or over). As mature sponsored students in full time employment, the social work students in my study had almost identical socio-economic status as they were all employed as unqualified social workers (apart from one participant who was a welfare rights advisor). This

employment / income based formula did not, however, reflect participants' own perception of their social class origins based on interview data. Patricia, Pamela and David, social work students whose writing I discuss in subsequent chapters, all identified themselves as having 'working class' origins derived from one or both parents, a cultural marker which was significant to them. Bernie did not specify any identification with a social class, but described her family as originating from first generation immigrants from Jamaica, again representing a strong social identification. Consequently, I have not attempted to provide a statistical comparison of social work with other disciplines in relation to social class but recognise that it is a central feature of participants' experiences.

Taking an overview of gender, age, qualifications, ethnicity and social class, therefore, social work students, based on the entrants in 2000, appear to have a strong representation of 'non-traditional' students, a profile which is still very similar in 2006 (UCAS, 2007). There is a very high representation of mature women with either no prior qualifications or vocational qualifications. In addition, although white students still make up the clear majority, Black students in particular are more strongly represented than on teaching or law courses. This profile closely matches that of the participants in my study.

1.8 The focus of the study

The study on which this thesis is based has followed the writing experiences of one tutor group of the Diploma in Social Work programme throughout a full academic year of stage 1 of their programme. The following section outlines the programme studied and details of sources of data used.

1.8.1 An outline of the social work programme studied

The programme studied was an employment-based distance-learning social work programme which could be undertaken on a full-time or part-time basis. In either case, students remained in employment whilst studying academic courses in a combination of study release time and their own time. Teaching was provided through a combination of distance learning materials distributed to students' homes and the support and guidance of tutors who provide face-to-face, telephone and correspondence support. Tutors had dual roles of mediating the course materials and assessing and commenting on students' written assignments. In order to complete the first stage of the programme students needed to complete two courses which will be referred to throughout as the 'practice learning course' and 'foundation course'. These courses were taken either simultaneously or in sequential years, the foundation course being a co- or pre-requisite for the practice learning course. The workload on students undertaking both the foundation and practice learning courses in one year was high, as they were studying courses earning up to 120 academic credits (CATS) per year, whilst working full time, with a study leave allowance of one day per week.

1.8.1.1 The practice learning course

The practice learning course was available only to students registered on the social work programme, unlike the foundation course which has open access. The curriculum of the practice learning course was based on the competences laid down by the Central Council for the Education and Training of Social Workers (CCETSW). Teaching was primarily provided via three

written study units, a sequence of seven obligatory 4-hour face-to-face workshops and a compulsory period of 60 days practice. This practice component made the practice learning course distinctive, in that practice lies at its core and constitutes 50% of learning and assessment. During students' period of practice learning they worked in a social work setting under the supervision of a qualified colleague who acted as a 'practice teacher'. The practice teacher assessed this period of practice by providing a report which constituted 50% of students' summative assessment. In addition to this period of assessed practice students undertook four pieces of written work, three formative and one summative, which was examined. The significance of this was that the formative work was marked and commented on by students' own tutors, while an independent marker, unknown to the student, assessed the examined work. Written assessment was intended to enable the student to demonstrate their ability to apply academic learning to practice through analysis and reflection.

1.8.1.2 The foundation course

The foundation course is a broad based course in health and social welfare. It can be studied as a stand-alone course leading to a certificate in health and social welfare, but is also a component in the social work award, the University's named degree in Health and Social Welfare and also its pre-registration nursing diploma. The foundation course, whilst having vocational relevance, is an 'open' academic course which means that students were permitted to enrol on a particular award or programme without being registered and without holding entry qualifications. It aims to prepare inexperienced students for further higher education study through the

introduction of study skills, but is available to anyone who has an interest in the topic of health and social care. The teaching approach draws heavily upon the use of case studies intended to introduce inexperienced learners to the specialist discourses of 'care'. The foundation course is taught via seven units of academic study and students were invited to attend 20 hours of voluntary tutorials spread over 8 months, usually divided into 2-hour sessions. The course is assessed via the submission of 7 written pieces, the first of which is formative, and the completion of a three hour unseen examination.

1.8.1.3 Key differences between the practice learning and foundation courses

There are two key differences in the content of the practice learning course and foundation course: the centrality of practice to teaching and assessment and also the approach taken to teaching study skills. While the foundation course is relevant to practice, it is essentially about developing knowledge rather than practice skills and no actual practice is undertaken. This has implications for the assessment of writing, as students are not required to draw upon their own personal or practice experiences. Where practice does appear in written assignments, it derives either from fictionalised case studies or from students' optional observations from their practice experience. The practice learning course, however, **requires** students to provide reflective narratives on practice and personal experiences in which they make links with

academic learning and professional values. University guidance on the practice learning course differentiates it from the foundation course as follows:

While...⁵ [the foundation course]... develops your study skills so that you can apply knowledge to practice, ...[the practice learning course]... concentrates more on writing about practice and learning how to generate evidence of competence. It gives you opportunities to develop and demonstrate competence in relation to 26 practice requirements laid down by the Council (University publicity document)

This introduces the second important distinction between the courses. The foundation course contains significant amounts of teaching which focuses on developing students' study skills, including academic writing. The practice learning course does not contain any teaching on study skills beyond assignment-specific briefing and generic guidance which directs students to the foundation course for advice. There are further generic resources available to students such as online and study skills guides.

1.8.1.4 The course materials

I had access to the full teaching materials for both the practice learning course and the foundation course, which consisted of written teaching material, audio recordings and set books. These provided useful background, but the main items analysed for the purposes of my study were the written guidance notes available for each course. A summary of these documents is provided in Figure 7:

⁵ '...' denotes omitted text in a quotation.

Figure 7: Written course guidance

| Practice learning course | Purpose | Written for |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Programme Guide | Provides an overview of the whole social work programme, including the contribution made by each of the courses. Introduces the practice learning courses in more detail and explains the role of assessment, including practice assessment | Tutor and student |
| Assignment Book | Outlines the assessment strategy, provides the assignment tasks and the marking criteria. | Tutor and student |
| Tutor Guide | Provides detailed advice on teaching, assessment and preparation for the face-to-face workshops | Tutor |
| Foundation course | Purpose | Written for |
| Introduction and study guide | Provides an overview of the course including the aims and learning outcomes. Introduces study skills, including the set study guide book and explains the role of assessment. | Tutor and student |
| Assignment Book | Outlines the assessment strategy, provides the assignment tasks and the marking criteria. | Tutor and student |
| Tutor Guide | Provides detailed advice on teaching, assessment and preparation for the tutorials. | Tutor |

These documents provide important information for students and tutors about the explicit expectations of students' writing and also the foci of assessment across the two courses. I explore these documents further in chapter 5.

1.8.1.5 The students and their texts

Students participating in the study were all drawn from one tutor group from the Diploma in Social Work programme outlined above. The tutor group studied comprised 16 students, 15 of whom participated in my study. Students were asked to give permission for the release of two assignments from the

foundation course and one from the practice learning course. All 15 students who participated in the study and their tutors agreed to these student texts being copied and sent to me after assessment by the central assignment handling office. Of the 15 participants, 6 were only undertaking the practice learning course during the year of the study as they had successfully undertaken the foundation course prior to my study. Of the 15 students in the tutor group, 8 gave permission to be involved in interviews. I was not able to expand my pool of active participants beyond these 8, due to the cost and time involved in visiting students. The students lived and worked at a location approximately 40 miles from my home and workplace, and I had agreed to conduct the interviews at a time and place of each student's choice. The consequence of this was that each interview required 3-4 hours including travel time and this, together with the cost of transport, placed a limitation on how many students I could involve in my research, which I was conducting alongside working full time.

The participants broadly reflected the national profile of social work students in the year of study outlined above. Although the majority of the group (73%) were women, this represented a slightly lower percentage compared with the national average of 85%. The youngest of the students involved in the study was 25 but all remaining participants were between 35 and 45 years. This is not dissimilar to the national average, the slightly older profile being explained by the fact that all students were sponsored by their employer. Sponsorship also impacted on prior qualifications, as the employer concerned selected students with demonstrable academic ability. For example, 25% of participants had prior degree-level qualifications which is considerably higher

than the national average of 5.5%; however only 2 participants had been in recent full or part time education and 9 of the 15 participants had qualifications such as GCSE, access, A-level equivalent or diploma awards rather than degrees. From the 15 participants, 2 did not provide information about their prior educational qualifications. The following table illustrates the group's prior qualifications.

Figure 8 Summary of participant information: prior education

| Prior Educational Experience | Number of students |
|---|---------------------------|
| Degree | 3 |
| Professional qualification/degree equivalent | 1 |
| Diploma | 2 |
| Access /A level | 3 |
| Professional qualification A level equivalent | 2 |
| GCSE | 2 |
| Declined to answer | 2 |

The ethnicity of participants broadly reflected that of the national statistics available from University and Colleges Admission System (UCAS) in 2000, as discussed above, with 60% of students being white, 27% Black (including Black British and Black Caribbean) and only 7% British Asian. However, clear comparisons with the UCAS data set are problematic partly because the classifications used do not always match students' self-definition and partly

due to the small numbers involved in my study. The following table illustrates the ethnicity (based upon self description) and gender of the group:

Figure 9 Summary of participant information: gender and ethnicity

| Student | Ethnicity | Gender |
|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | White | Female |
| 2 | White | Female |
| 3 | British Asian | Female |
| 4 | White | Female |
| 5 | White | Male |
| 6 | White | Female |
| 7 | Black British | Female |
| 8 | White | Male |
| 9 | White | Female |
| 10 | White | Male |
| 11 | Not known | Male |
| 12 | Black British | Female |
| 13 | White | Female |
| 14 | Black Caribbean | Female |
| 15 | Non participant | Non participant |
| 16 | Black Caribbean | Female |

1.8.1.6 The case studies

The thesis draws upon data from all of the participants discussed above, but for the purpose of illustrating my argument I will be presenting four case

studies of Pamela, David, Patricia and Bernie. I discuss case study as methodology in 4.11.2.

I selected the 4 case study participants for a number of reasons. Firstly they had contributed a full set of data (with the exception of Bernie who had studied the foundation course in the preceding year). The four selected participants also represented the diversity contained in the group with one black Jamaican and three white students, three women and one man. Two students had degrees (undertaken more than 10 years prior to the study), the other two both had vocational higher education qualifications undertaken within the previous five years. Unfortunately there were no students without higher education qualifications who participated in the interviews. This arose due to the very small number of students without Higher Education qualifications who gained sponsorship. Consequently I was unable to represent this experience in my sample. The case study students are referred to throughout by their pseudonyms. They can be identified in Figure 9 as follows:

| | | |
|----|---|----------|
| 4 | = | Pamela |
| 8 | = | David |
| 13 | = | Patricia |
| 16 | = | Bernie |

1.9 The structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises eight chapters. Following this introduction, chapter 2 will outline the relevant research literature. This broadly encompasses work discussed above relating to academic literacy with a particular focus on academic writing as a social practice. Attention will be paid to research

concerned with academic writing in practice-based disciplines broadly and social work in particular. Chapter 3 provides a critical analysis of research concerned with the way in which identity relates to academic writing which, to date, has largely drawn upon sociological perspectives. This chapter includes some proposals for developing current approaches through exploring the potential contribution of psychosocial perspectives. Chapter 4 outlines methods of data collection, the qualitative methodology used and including approaches to interviewing which draw upon techniques influenced by a psychological perspective. It also considers the methods of analysis used in this thesis. In chapters 5, 6 and 7, I present my data. Chapter 5 aims to explore the expectations of writing on the practice learning and foundation courses based upon data from the course materials and associated written guidance, tutors and students. Chapter 6 is concerned with the nature and demands of reflective writing, undertaken primarily on the practice learning course. Chapter 7 focuses on writer identity and explores the ways in which writer identity influences and is played out through writing, particularly that undertaken on the practice learning course. Chapter 8 summarises the findings of this thesis, identifies pedagogical implications and suggests areas of further work.

2. Chapter two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The following review of literature aims to provide a context for investigating academic student writing in social work through an overview of key research on student writing. The chapter begins with a summary of the key research relating to a socially orientated perspective on academic writing in higher education, specifically that of academic literacies. Two particularly relevant and related areas of research are explored in more detail, those of disciplinarity and non-traditional students. Research drawing on an academic literacies perspective that has specifically focused on academic writing in practice-based higher education, such as nursing and teacher training, is reviewed before moving on to research that has explored writing in social work education. One of the central themes to emerge from this literature is the place of reflective practice and reflective writing in the discipline of social work. Research in both these areas is discussed, as is the related area of 'risky writing' in the context of composition studies in the US.

2.2 Academic writing

Academic writing plays a central part in higher education in the UK, forming the primary medium through which students are assessed. In the context of a highly selective higher education system, the ability of students to convey their understanding through the medium of academic writing has been a basic expectation. Concern has increasingly been expressed in the UK about the

quality of student writing, which Lillis suggests can be linked to both the expanding population and widening of access to higher education (Lillis, 2001, p. 21). This has partly come about as a result of the development of the post 1970s universities and partly a political agenda to increase the number of graduates. Despite this concern, responses to date from higher education institutions in the UK have primarily either been in the form of remedial support for individual students focused through libraries or study support centres or where student need is perceived more broadly, through study support modules (Lea and Street, 2000; Lillis, 2001). Confidence in the existence of a universal set of transferable skills has continued to influence writing support in the UK where a 'skills deficit' model remains influential. Such a model relies upon students supplementing 'deficits' in writing skills via support offered through workbooks, toolkits, electronic skills labs and teaching which focuses on teaching surface elements of written language such as punctuation and spelling.

In the US, whilst there has been a long tradition of proactively teaching writing to students across the ability and experience range, provision has also focused on the teaching of technical skills. Targeted support for students identified as having difficulties with writing in English grew out of the 'basic writing movement', a specific kind of provision intended to meet the needs of expanding numbers of students entering higher education in the 1960s, many of whom used English as a second language or spoke a vernacular English;

Some of the most rudimentary questions we confronted were: How do you make standard English verb endings available to a dialect speaker? How do you teach English prepositional forms to a Spanish-language student? What are the arguments for and against 'Black

English'? The English of academic papers and theses? Is standard English simply a weapon of colonization? ... We were dealing not simply with dialect and syntax but with the imagery of lives, the anger and flare of urban youth - how could these be used, strengthened, without the lies of artificial polish? (Rich, 2001, p. 4)

The paper from which this quotation is taken was first published in 1973, and illustrates those issues such as the diversity of writer experiences, access and participation appeared to be recognised on some American university programmes. Shaughnessy (1977) offered the term 'basic writer' in an attempt to move away from the association between remedial classes and ability. She recognised that many students had maturity and the ability to express themselves orally which was not matched by their skills in writing within the context of the academy. The function of basic writing in the US, therefore, was to equip these students with the skills and confidence in writing to enable them to participate in higher education (Rich, 2001, p. 4). Those involved in the development of basic writing programmes suggested that with a universal set of writing skills, students would be both socially emancipated and linguistically prepared to participate in any field of education.

Lillis (2001), drawing upon an overview of institutional responses in Australia and South Africa, as well as the UK and US, offers three common characteristics of specific writing provision. Firstly, a shared focus on the text produced by the student as the site of concern, or 'problem' to be fixed, rather than exploring the nature of the task set, the nature of institutional or disciplinary practices surrounding academic writing or indeed the behaviour of those responding to texts. Secondly, Lillis refers to the 'institutional claim to transparency', by which she means that, while the student text is made visible

as the source of concern, factors arising from disciplinary and institutional practices remain both hidden and accepted as 'given'. Thirdly, there is a belief not only that the solution lies in the student's production of the text, but that correcting this is straightforwardly achieved (Lillis, 2001, p. 22). The assumptions underpinning these three characteristics are that students' difficulties with writing will be resolved by providing them with the 'skills for the job' through either add-on study skills modules, composition classes, attendance at a writing centre or the provision of writing skills toolkits. According to Lillis (2001, p. 22-23), this is an unhelpful assumption.

A growing body of research has developed over the past ten years which has questioned the helpfulness of focusing only on skill development, as characterised by provision in the UK, US, Australia and South Africa. This body of research has explored academic writing as a context specific activity in which an understanding of social and interactional influences are essential and challenges the transparency of institutional practices (Street, 1984; Lillis, 1997; Lea and Street, 1998; Horner and Lu, 1999; Baynham, 2000; Lillis, 2001).

2.2.1 Academic literacies

Baynham (1995; 2000) and Lea and Street (1998) both propose a 'three-perspectives' model of provision of literacy academic support. These can be broadly represented as follows:

Figure 10 Models of literacy

| | Approaches | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| Models of literacy | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Baynham | Skills-based | Text-based | Practice-based |
| | Approaches | | |
| Models of literacy | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Lea and Street | Study skills | Academic socialization | Academic literacies |

Approach 1 in Baynham (2000, p.19) and Lea and Street (2000, p. 35) refers to an understanding of academic writing as a set of transferable, generic skills and strategies which can be taught across the academy. This presupposes a focus on the acquisition of surface features of language use, treating literacy as a transparent technical skill which can be transmitted. Approach 2, according to Baynham (2000, p.19), focuses on the discipline-specific nature of writing tasks leading to writing support focusing on identified requirements of specific disciplines. Lea and Street's socialisation model (2000, p. 35) views language in terms of 'learning academic discourses'. In this model the student becomes an apprentice to the culture of a specific academy and related ways of learning and associated writing practices. Through involvement in discourse communities, students become sufficiently familiar with the practices to be able to participate, initially as a novice but increasingly as a full member. For Baynham therefore, the focus is on disciplinarity, whilst for Lea and Street it is on enculturation within the academy and discourse communities. Baynham's practice-based approach shares some features of Lea and Street's 'academic socialisation' in its concern with socialisation into

social and discursive practices, although again Baynham pitches these at the disciplinary level rather than the institutional. Lea and Street, meanwhile, focus on broader social practices influencing writing:

It [academic literacies] views student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation. An academic literacies approach views the institutions in which academic practices take place as constituted in, and as the sites of, discourse and power.' (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 35)

Lea and Street (2000b) suggest that the first and second approaches identified in their model have limitations; the skills model because it disregards the diversity and complexity of writing across disciplines and genres, and the socialisation model because not only does it imply a homogeneity within disciplines but it excludes issues of personhood and identity. Lea suggests that:

Academic literacy can be viewed as a mediating domain between adult students' wider cultural worlds and the final pieces of written work that they hand in for assessment (Lea, 1998, p. 156)

Within the UK, the academic literacies model was developed from 'New Literacy Studies', represented by the work of Street (Street, 1984), Barton (1984) and Barton and Hamilton (Barton and Hamilton 1998). This research examined community-based literacy practices and was concerned with the social (as opposed to the cognitive) and cultural influences on reading and writing. Barton and Hamilton's work, therefore, illustrates an interest in literacy as a 'social practice' where literacy is conceived of as dependant upon social context and relationships. These ideas have been applied to higher education and in doing so challenge the skills and socialisation models with the 'academic literacies' model, which recognises the contested nature of

academic and student writing and the diverse positions and identities that participants take up. The academic literacies approach moves away from problematising individual students or even student sub groups, but instead focuses upon institutional practices:

Viewing literacy from a cultural and social practice approach (rather than in terms of educational judgements about good or bad writing) and approaching meanings as contested can give us insights into the nature of academic literacy in particular and academic learning in general. (Lea and Street, 1998, p. 33)

Lea and Street (1998) suggest that the implicit nature of disciplinary culture reinforces the power imbalance between student and tutor; power relations go beyond this relationship as significant academic practices are dictated at an institutional level:

The institutions within which tutors and students write defines the conventions and boundaries of their writing practices, through its procedures and regulations (definitions of plagiarism, requirements of modularity and assessment procedures and regulations.), whatever individual tutors and students may believe themselves to be as writers and whatever autonomy and distinctiveness their disciplines may assert. (Lea and Street, 1998, p.169)

Lea and Street (1998; 2000) therefore join the challenge to the traditional view of language as being a transparent code, which can be learnt, applied and re-applied, in different contexts. Thus, academic literacies moves literacy studies from a common sense view of 'good writing' to recognising the significance of individual contextualised writing acts where the importance of both writer and 'addressee' are acknowledged. The term 'addressee' derives from the concept of addressivity, discussed by Lillis (2001), drawing upon the work of Bakhtin (1981). Lillis suggests that:

At its most straightforward, it [addressivity] signals that utterances, spoken or written, are addressed to someone, and thus foregrounds the ways in which this addressivity contributes to the shaping of what will be said or written. (Lillis, 2001, p. 43)

The addressee, therefore, is the person who the writer imagines or intends a text to be read by and the concept of addressivity suggests that the ways in which texts are created are influenced by an awareness of the addressee. This focus on the relationship between the writer and reader as individuals 'interacting' in the creation of texts is significant to this thesis because of the potential contribution of a psychosocial approach in helping us understand the nature of this interaction, particularly due to the part played by the imagination of the writer. Psychoanalysis introduces ways of thinking about the behaviours and experiences of writers (including interaction with readers) which go beyond the purely social, for example introducing the concepts of emotion and unconscious motivations (see 3.8.4).

Two themes arise from the body of work outlined above, along with research emanating from the US, which are particularly relevant to this thesis: firstly the impact of disciplinary differences on student writing within higher education programmes, particularly those leading to professional or vocational awards, and secondly the issue of identity and personhood. The next section addresses disciplinarity, before moving on to consider a particular aspect of personhood in the form of the non-traditional student.

2.2.2 Disciplinarity

This thesis is concerned with student writing in the specific context of the discipline of social work. Debates on disciplinarity are of relevance due to the

broad disciplinary base of social work, drawing upon sociology, psychology, social policy and evolving discourses of care. The work of researchers such as Bazerman and Prior (Bazerman 1981; Bazerman 1988; Prior 1998; Bazerman and Prior 2004), and Horner and Lu (Horner and Lu 1999) have played an important role in opening up the debate about the nature and teaching of student writing. This included identifying and exploring the implications of diverse cross-disciplinary academic writing conventions and examining writing acts as social practices, or as communication processes which are embedded in social contexts, interactions and relationships. Bazerman's (1981) major contribution to literacy has been to put the *context* of writing on the map. Horner and Lu explore the ways in which texts convey knowledge, and suggests that texts are not 'empty-vessels' (Horner and Lu 1999 p. 367) carrying knowledge, but rather that text- and knowledge- making are interdependent and that understanding any text requires an appreciation of the influence of context. In Bazerman and Prior (2004) Prior provides a model for understanding the influence of context through an influential four dimensional model:

The scripts are examined in relationship to four contexts; the object under study, the literature of the field, the anticipated audience and the author's own self'. (Bazerman and Prior, 2004, p. 362)

The work of Prior (1998), based on ethnographic studies of writing in academic contexts, focuses on disciplinarity and this four-context model opens up possibilities for exploring the meaning and intentions of the author as evidenced in the text. In highlighting the diversity and situated nature of literate activities across disciplines, he also suggests that such practices are

fluid, both influenced by and influencing writers participating in them. At the same time writers are frequently also participating in non-heterogeneous disciplines or indeed working across disciplines and the intersubjectivity resulting from these practices also contributes to the fluidity of disciplinary conventions. This is particularly the case with student writers in social work, a discipline which draws upon a range of disciplines and forms of writing with various conventions, as discussed further in 2.3.1.

Lea (1998) draws upon Bazerman's suggestion that written texts reflect disciplinary discourses and also construct them. This arises because writers make choices in their writing which result in specific meanings, thereby contributing to constructing knowledge. Lea uses this concept of writer choice to consider the ways in which adult learners also bring knowledge and experience with them into their writing, negotiating Bazerman and Prior's four contexts, identified above in this section of the object of study, relevant literature, the anticipated audience and author's own self (Lea, 1998).

In their research based on interviews with students and academic staff, Lea and Street (1998) identify 'course switching' as a common feature of study, particularly in year one. Lea and Street are here borrowing the term 'switching' from the concept of 'code-switching' (Gumperz, 1982) cited in Lea and Street (2000, p. 38) to indicate a speaker or writer's movement between languages or dialects. In this context the movement is between disciplinary writing conventions. Courses they studied frequently included elements from different disciplines requiring students to arrive at their own personal interpretations of writing requirements. The views of academic staff in Lea and

Street's research illustrated that they retained expectations of texts based upon their own discipline; this resulted in divergent expectations across tutors not only in one institution but also across courses. Lea and Street (1998), drawing on the work of Bazerman, suggest that academic staff in their study were strongly influenced in their expectations of student writing by their own disciplinary backgrounds and that dissonance arising from any divergence from these expectations was frequently expressed in criticism of 'surface features of students' texts. Here surface features refer to spelling, punctuation, handwriting or grammatical features such as concord. Such dissonance, and consequent criticism, was more common on modular or multi-disciplinary courses, particularly where the assessment strategy included students undertaking diverse writing tasks such as communicating with non-specialist audiences or writing tasks which related specifically to a professional task. The consequence of this disciplinary orientation was that:

...underlying, often disciplinary, assumptions about the nature of knowledge affected the meaning given to the terms 'structure' and 'argument'... elements of successful student writing are in essence related to particular ways of constructing the world, and not a set of generic writing skills as the study skills model would suggest. (Lea and Street, 2000b, p. 39)

This lack of clarity in relation to writing requirements resulted in students finding it very difficult to write across disciplines and writing tasks. Advice from tutors was conflictual and inconsistent resulting in students attempting to stick closely to disciplinary conventions where they were familiar or guessing at what they thought assessors required. The high proportion of social work students who reflect the profile of non-traditional students make this research particularly pertinent to my thesis.

2.2.3 Non-traditional students

The concept of 'mystery' in relation to writing conventions is developed in research such as that of Horner and Lu (1999) in their work on basic writing and that of Lillis (1997; 2001), whose work is particularly concerned with non-traditional students. Lillis (2001) suggests that non-traditional student writers are particularly disadvantaged in accessing implicit discoursal writing cultures and that this consequently affects their participation in academic writing. As noted above, an awareness of the particular literacy needs of students with English as a second language or those who do speak non-standard English was recognised with the expansion of the higher education population in the US from the 1960s onwards (Halasek and Highberg, 2001). More recent research in the UK has focused on the needs of non-traditional students not only in the context of academic writing (Lillis, 1997; Lillis, 2001; Lillis and Turner, 2001) but also in the broader context of the culture of higher education (Bowl, 2000; Bowl, 2002). This work suggests that it is not only linguistic differences which create barriers to participation. Students who differ in terms of age, culture and ethnicity from what has been considered to be the traditional higher education student can experience barriers to participation which relate to their identity and the cultural norms of higher education institutions.

In the context of academic writing, Lillis suggests that, in addition to any cultural or linguistic differences, non-traditional students may not have had the opportunity to experience the gradual familiarisation with academic writing offered to those students who have been able to progress systematically through the educational system, acquiring incremental familiarisation with

writing skills. Where familiarity with academic writing conventions is missing or limited, students are further disadvantaged by the implicit nature of specific writing conventions, such as 'essayist literacy'. Lillis (1997) identifies particular difficulties with what she calls 'essayist literacy'. She identifies that student writing frequently labelled as an 'essay' can disguise complex and implicit expectations of students' writing which has the effect of constraining students' meaning making. The essay, in fact, represents a very particular way of constructing knowledge which, whilst frequently presented as transparent, is both implicit and complex.

Unfortunately, explicit teaching and exploration of conventions is not common practice, one of the reasons being that within the institution, conventions continue to be viewed as appropriate and unproblematic, as 'common sense'. (Lillis, 1997, p. 186)

Lillis also highlights the importance of the power dimension in student writing, which is particularly pertinent to non-traditional students and is also discussed in relation to Lea's research above (Lea, 1998). Lillis suggests that the sense of exclusion experienced by some students goes further than struggling to attain a particular genre. The power imbalance experienced by the non-traditional students in her research compounded their frustration, as they felt unable to question or challenge the implicit expectations against which they were being assessed. Through exploring the experiences of student writers, Lillis (2001) expresses concern about the ways in which student identities are reflected in academic writing. She suggests that academic writing conventions, by their implicit nature, regulate or influence students' identities and expressions of self by valuing particular ways of being in their writing.

Drawing on her research data Lillis writes:

All student-writers point to problems in drawing on their habits of meaning within the institutional context of HE...Nadia feels that by using more formal wordings she acquires a new social status...Mary likes and wants some new words, both she and Sara point to the enforced need to imagine themselves and their words as white in order to disguise their selves, their Black, bilingual selves in their academic writing. Both feel that the risk of revealing their selves in their writing is too great, both in terms of tutor marks and of how they will be viewed. (Lillis, 2001, p.105)

Lillis (2001, p. 38-9) draws upon Gee (1990) to suggest that the identity of the author is fictionalised in essayist literacy through a process of adherence to a set of regulatory practices which privilege certain social groups. One consequence of essayist literacy practices, therefore, is that the writers are inhibited from presenting culturally specific aspects of their identity in academic writing. From Lillis's (2001) data, students' perception of their cultural 'difference' from their tutors and the academic institution seemed to result in writers editing out experiences or opinions which they felt might be 'inappropriate' in their academic student role.

...If they're (tutors) asking specifically for my experiences and what I feel, then that's fine. But if not, then you have to put yourself away from that, you know, basically write what they want you to write. (from extract 9 of taped discussion on students' scripts, (Lillis, 1997: 195)

Lillis's research, therefore, raises important issues, not only about non-traditional students, but also more broadly in relation to identity and writing. This has particular relevance to this study not only because of my focus on writer identity but also due to the particular profile of social work students as 'necessarily' non-traditional, as discussed in 1.7 and 2.2.3.

2.3 Literacy and Writing Practices

I have referred above to the concept of 'social' and more specifically 'literacy' practices' in relation to student writing. Ivanič (1997), drawing on Baynham (1995) uses the term 'literacy practices' to mark a specific interest in those culturally embedded activities and behaviours associated with literacy within a wider concept of social practices, which she defines as:

Ways of acting in and responding to life situations (Ivanič, 1998, p. 65)

Both 'social' and 'literacy' practices are terms which are firmly socially orientated, recognising the ways in which particular ways of acting are culturally shaped and privileged as a result of discursively constructed power dynamics, or subject positioning. Lea and Street (1998) refer to 'writing practices' in addition to using the term literacy practices. In Lea's discussion of literacy practices she makes specific reference to *the kinds of relationships between tutor and students* (Lea and Street, 2000, p. 70) which, although implied by Ivanič in the concept of social context, was not explicitly stated.

Lillis (2001, p. 29) offers three levels of interpretations of the concept of literacy practices. Firstly, as used by Lea, Stierer and Ivanič, practice refers to the idea that specific usages of texts are intrinsically bound up with the material and social context in which they take place. Her second usage draws upon the concept of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1991) and suggests that practices involved with the production of texts become embedded in the unconscious, implicit, everyday actions shared within social groups or institutions. The third interpretation links reading and writing, embedding them both in social

structures which also mould them. From these interpretations stem two distinct but related uses of the concept of practice. Firstly it relates to individual writing acts and secondly it relates to those ways of being and doing which are common and frequently implicit or unconscious. This appears to be a helpful distinction in that the individual writing 'practice' of one writer may also be influenced by those common writing 'practices' of a community or discoursal group.

Prior (1998) also refers specifically to 'writing as practice' and broadens still the conceptualisation of 'practice'. Firstly he associates a range of activities with the production of a text, including reading, thinking, planning, interacting with other people and texts, including seeking feedback. In describing the 'process' of writing, Prior does not break down these activities into stages, but instead suggests that:

Writing moves forward (and backward) in fits and starts, with pauses and flurries, discontinuities and conflicts. (Prior, 1998, p. 171)

Prior adds the psychological concept of emotion to the process of writing, reminding us that:

*'Many of these behaviours seem related to the writing, to **managing emotions** as well as the creative process' (Bazerman and Prior, 2004, p. 171) [my emphasis].*

Concepts including the circularity of the actions involved in writing practice (Prior 1988), the importance of human interaction, in addition to practices being located in a discursively constructed social world (Lea and Street, 2000; Prior, 1988) and the recognition of emotion (Bazerman, 2004) are particularly

significant to this thesis. I will be taking these three concepts forward in my own use of the term writing practices.

2.3.1 Academic writing in practice-based higher education

Research drawing on a social practices approach to academic writing has included work specifically concerned with writing in practice-based higher education, both graduate and post-graduate. Three important features distinguish these particular disciplinary fields. Firstly they share a requirement for students to undertake assessed practice alongside academic learning. Secondly they lead to a professional qualification with a licence to practice and thirdly they involve heavily externally prescribed curricula often drawing upon a range of disciplinary discourses. Such practice-based disciplines include teaching, nursing and social work. Writing undertaken on such programmes of study pose particular challenges to students, and as was identified in chapter 1 for academics and practitioners writing within these disciplines in academic journals. The writing undertaken on practice-based courses also has the potential to be particularly complex in that it draws on both academic and practice-based learning, which not only involves the use of a range of discourses but positions the student in different identities, most obviously as 'student' and 'professional'.

Baynham (1995), focusing on nurse education, suggests that new or emergent disciplines in higher education, such as nurse education, require students to navigate a greater range and diversity of disciplines through their writing than single discipline subjects:

So pity the poor nursing student, who is required to write at times like a sociologist, at others like a philosopher, yet again like a scientist and finally as a reflective practitioner. (Baynham, 2000, p. 17)

He further suggests that the disciplinary differences impact not only on content or form but also on the way in which knowledge is conceptualised. This exposes a conflict within nursing between positivist positions represented by clinical subjects and interpretative positions represented by ethical subjects (Baynham, 2000, p. 21). Other conflicts include practical versus theoretical knowledge and practice-based versus professionalised learning, an issue explored by Scott (2000) and discussed below in this section. Nurse education, in common with other practice-based education, attempts to weave a path between these contrasting disciplines to enable student nurses to write as nurses, rather than as 'ethical scientists' or 'practical theorists'. Baynham suggests that students authorize (or provide authority for) their writing through the use of authoritative texts cited in their own words but also through the use of practice-based experience (for further discussion of authority in practice based student writing, see 6.5). The professional nature of the course he studied meant that students relying on practice-based experience were not necessarily disadvantaged and that highly successful students were those who could draw both together. I will return to this balance between academic and practice-based writing skills in chapter 5.5.2.

Stierer's research (2000a; 2000b) was undertaken with qualified teachers studying for a master's qualification in education. This work is concerned with the ways in which student writers are positioned through both the guidance and conventions of writing and the feedback on assignments. The component

courses of this award demonstrated a diversity of discourses and consequent expectations of student writing, as suggested by Lea and Street (1998).

Stierer found that the discourses drawn upon by the course did not reflect any kind of 'professional' role and, despite the priorities of students, did not heavily value practice experience. Instead traditional academic discipline-based discourses (such as sociology and psychology) were valued in writing over professional discourses. According to Stierer, this inhibited the potential for the development of an integrated professionally orientated academic discourse which might more closely reflect the students' priorities.

Scott's research (2000), referred to above, is also concerned with the writing of postgraduate trainee teachers for whom the development of skills in reflective practice is central to their training. Her research suggests (in common with Stierer) that some students appeared to privilege practice experience in their writing above more traditional academic discourses, and this raised a concern for Scott. The emphasis on reflection, and the way in which this has been translated into written assignments, has, according to Scott, been influenced by the partnership of higher education institutions and schools (or practice learning environments) in teacher training. In the examples of student writing analysed by Scott, she suggests that writers took different approaches to including practice in their writing and that, based on the essays analysed, students' writing showed evidence of being instrumental and overly influenced by the practice environment of the school. Scott, drawing on Bernstein (1996), proposes that the concept of 'performance' (or the demonstration of specialized knowledge and skills resulting from detailed guidance) risks supplanting 'competence' (the holistic consequence of

scholarly learning) in postgraduate teacher training. Scott raises the concern that 'beginning teachers' are limiting their participation in scholarly debates as independent agents which in turn affects their identity as a student. Scott concludes that whilst a performance model risks portraying writing as over simplified transferable skills, competence can equally be seen as unteachable and suggests that, particularly for those students who move between academic and practice-based learning, there is a need to identify a middle road:

... such an approach could accommodate attention to the particularities of linguistic choice within the competing discourses of the workplace and the university. (Scott, 2000, p. 124).

Hoadley-Maidment (2000), focusing on students studying health and social care, identified the difficulty experienced by students in combining narratives of personal or practice experiences with academic discourses based upon argumentation. Tutors in her study had expectations that students would demonstrate the ability not only to use argument and narrative, but also to combine them in one assignment. Based on her study, Hoadley-Maidment suggests that the skills required to achieve this synthesis involve the high-order cognitive skills of analysis and critical reflection (Hoadley-Maidment, 2000, p.174). It is interesting to note that Hoadley-Maidment identifies the expectation of these skills at level 1 of health and social care qualifications, whilst Scott illustrates very similar writing tasks being pitched as evidence of 'postgraduateness'. Hoadley-Maidment's work is of particular interest as she identifies very similar challenges faced by students and assessors in relation

to combining experience and academic argument, an issue discussed in more depth in 5.5.2.

2.4 Student writing in social work in the US

Although research interest relating specifically to student social work writing in the UK is very limited, there is a small body of work in the US which can be broadly divided into three categories. Firstly, work concerned with using writing as a tool for learning (Germain, 1991; Baker and Nelson, 1992; Mazza, 1999), secondly research into the use of expressive writing and poetry to develop practice skills such as empathy (Furman, 2003; Furman, 2005) or as a therapeutic tool (Chan, 2003). Thirdly some attention has been paid to the development of students' competence in academic writing skills in the context of social work (Simon and Soven, 1989; Waller, 1996; Waller, 2000; Watson, 2002).

Falk and Ross (2001) survey the diversity of written assignments required of students studying for the baccalaureate in social work in the US. The authors foreground the centrality of writing skills to social work both in the context of practice itself and the dissemination of best practice through academic journals. Falk and Ross' study identifies nine purposes of writing and links these with the kinds of assignments used, as well as the writing and other social work skills each addresses. Falk and Ross's tabular summary of their findings is reproduced in Figure 11:

Figure 11 Purposes of writing in social work education

| | Purposes of Writing | Assignments to practice social work writing | Writing skill being addressed | Other social work skill being addressed |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| 1 | To understand and care for the self | Reflective writing; Personal journal: free writing, | Getting started, overcoming barriers, writing freely | Self-knowledge |
| 2 | To communicate the self to others | Professional journal | Writing coherently, mechanics | Expressing the professional self |
| 3 | To understand the perspective of others | Writing in the voice of a client | Writing from a consistent point of view | Empathy, ability to envision a client's world view |
| 4 | To describe | Description of clients, agency, community, social work transactions | Making writing come to life, creating accurate, detailed representations | Observational skills, ability to recognise bias, communication of professional information |
| 5 | To analyze | Psychosocial assessment, process recording, term papers | Organization, using logical progression of ideas | Critical thinking skills: Drawing inferences from descriptive information |
| 6 | To be accountable | Agency documentation: Treatment plans, progress notes, treatment summaries | Clarity, focus, consciousness of diverse perspectives and requirements of potential readers | Analytic reasoning skills: Ability to formulate appropriate specific time-framed, measurable goals and objectives |
| 7 | To reach and persuade diverse audiences | Proposals, testimony, letters to the editor, etc | Adapting genre and terminology to audience | Communication skills, including cross cultural communication, working with diversity |
| 8 | To participate in knowledge-building | Reading journal articles, writing articles, research | Writing to share practice discoveries, writing for publication | Analytic reasoning skills, clear succinct communication of ideas, conceptualisation of professional practice |
| 9 | To represent the profession to society | Any and all assignments | Using 'the social work voice'. | Ability to communicate social work ethics, world views, practice models |

Adapted from Falk and Ross, 2001, p. 128.

This table illustrates well the range of writing required of social work students, and in particular highlights the relevance of identity. I have added numbering to assist in identifying the incidences of identity. These include the ability to understand (1) and communicate (2) the 'self' which is distinguished from the requirement to portray both the professional self (7 and 9) and the self as a member of an academic discourse community (7 and 8). Falk and Ross suggest that reflective writing through non-assessed journals can:

Develop enhanced self-knowledge while generating ideas about outer phenomena...It can relieve inner tensions by permitting the social worker to channel feelings, reactions and experiences into self discovery and other kinds of learning. (Falk and Ross, 2001, p. 129)

Reflective writing in this context is placed outside of assessed academic assignments and represented as both a therapeutic and learning tool which can assist students in developing writing skills through building confidence and practice skills through reflections drawing together external knowledge and internal experience. I return to this theme of reflective writing as a non-assessed developmental learning tool in 2.5.2.

Germain (1991) and Baker and Nelson (1992) researched learning journals specifically, exploring the benefits for student social workers. Germain, explores the relative benefits of journal writing compared with alternative forms of written assessment as a tool to develop both writing and analytical skills, whilst Baker and Nelson are concerned with using journals to develop deeper personal reflection. Germain's study was undertaken within the researcher's institution through an evaluated pilot scheme, which involved students participating and providing brief feedback on their experience of using journals. Although the research findings indicated that some students

did not want to take the risk of writing about personal (as opposed to practice) experiences, Germain suggests that those that did so in her study indicated that they felt that they had learnt more from the exercise. Germain concludes that the use of the journal demanded a high level of commitment from both student and tutor, who read and commented on journal entries periodically through the course. She suggests that:

... the journal serves as the connector of personal self to professional self as well as the connector of theory to practice issues. (Germain, 1991, p.12).

Feedback from students in Germain's study highlights both the personal sensitivity involved in assessed journal writing and the consequent reluctance of *some* students to engage in it. Germain does not suggest why such personal writing may be difficult or why it might be more difficult for some students than others.

Baker and Nelson (1992) also explore the benefits of journal writing in social work education. The authors discuss their experience of using journal writing with social work students to enable them to reflect upon their personal experiences of family. The purpose of this aspect of training was to facilitate students' awareness of their own family histories and, where necessary, resolve problematic family experiences so that they could work more effectively with service users. As with Germain, the journals were used to draw together personal, experiential reflections and discussion of new learning. Students were encouraged to write in the first person using an 'informal genre' more typical of spoken rather than written language. The authors highlight the reluctance and anxiety expressed by some students in

engaging in this form of writing, particularly in relation to discussing values and beliefs and disclosing 'private' information about their families. Students were encouraged to overcome this 'resistance' and use the experience as a method for empathising with the parallel resistance of service users. The authors also suggest that sensitivity is needed in the assessment of journals, with instructors entering a *non-threatening dialogue by responding personally and positively to selected entries* (Germain, 1991, p. 54) and employing a grading system which gave credit for the submission of a specified minimum number of journal entries in addition to a focus on values and beliefs rather than on knowledge. Both of these studies, therefore, identified a level of anxiety or resistance to undertaking personal writing demonstrated by some students. The attitudes and feelings of students towards such personal writing is one area which will be followed up as an important theme in this thesis (see 6.4 and chapter 7).

Simon and Soven (1989) and Waller (1996; 2000) share a concern about the quality of social work student writing and their work again draws attention to the importance of self in academic writing. Simon and Soven suggest that support from writing centres alone will not fully address the need identified. In their study, they piloted and evaluated the use of learning journals with students early in their studies, which encouraged them to draw together reflections on practice, self-knowledge and theory. This journal was commented on periodically by the instructor but was not graded. For two further assignments the instructions on established writing tasks were modified to clarify the audience and purpose of the writing. For more advanced students, a 'double entry journal' was used. This represented a

note book in which the pages were divided into two columns, one for contemporaneous observations during class and the other for interpretations completed after a time lag which allowed an opportunity for reflection on the observations. This journal was also considered a learning tool and was therefore not graded. Based upon this study, Simon and Soven suggest that the association of writing tasks with professional development generally, and specifically with constructing views of society helped to motivate students. Academic writing therefore became more relevant and embedded in a process of thinking, feedback and learning.

Despite Simon and Soven's concern about the quality of social work student writing, it was not until 1996 that Waller published a study responding to their concerns, followed up by a second paper in 2000. Through her study, Waller (1996) identified four main areas of difficulty for her social work students in relation to writing, none of which directly relates to reflective writing. Firstly she found that assessed writing was not treated as developmental, so students did not work on improving texts, secondly no specific teaching was provided on writing, thirdly writing often resulted in 'patchwork texts' constituted by the writer stitching together extracts from other texts but in which an authoritative voice is missing. Waller suggests that this stemmed from students' lack of confidence in their own voices, both in speaking and in writing. Fourthly Waller suggests that students perceived writing as an innate skill possessed by bright students, not as something developmental which all students had to acquire and which was intrinsic to learning. As a response to these concerns, Waller developed and evaluated a model of teaching writing through the students undertaking short 'reflections' based on texts that they

had read. These papers took a position, which was discussed and justified in group discussions at the end of each weekly class and then re-drafted. A final paper was submitted at the end of the semester based upon the best two papers from each student's work. In her evaluation, Waller (1996) emphasises the benefits of free writing and peer review as essential components of developing writing skills. She recommends an assessment strategy that allows for such free writing and peer review, in that it should be staged, non-assessed but with instructor feedback and, after revisions, leading towards a final assessed piece. Waller also provides discussion of supportive tutor feedback based upon the concept of responding to rather than correcting texts. This involves tutors taking care over the focus, nature and extent of feedback and also suggesting transmittal notes undertaken by the student (or notes explaining their thoughts behind their text) to enable the tutor to focus comment and set up dialogue. Through these recommendations, although not directly stated, Waller appears to be recognising the personal nature of social work students' writing and the consequent need for sensitive and responsive feedback. Her proposals share much with those of Berman in his discussion of personal or 'expressionist' writing (Berman, 2001, p. 24) (discussed below in 2.6) in which students write about personal experiences.

2.5 Student writing in social work: the UK context

In the UK research on academic writing in social work has been sparse, with little research focusing specifically on the writing undertaken by student social

workers. Heron and Murray (2004), as outlined above in 1.6, contribute a challenging analysis of why particular practitioners may be excluded from publishing. Although this research does not relate specifically to the writing of social work students, it contains some relevant discussion about the differences in writing developed through academic and vocational professional training, suggesting that vocational qualifications taken by, for example, residential care workers, do not prepare them for writing academic papers.

Watson (2002) represents an institutional response to a problem experienced by students undertaking a particular assignment in one institution in the East of England. Lecturing staff observed that the pass rate was particularly low in one assignment, an 'integrated assignment' which was an example of assessed writing complying with the CCETSW (1996a) requirement for reflection discussed in 1.2.1. In this extended piece of writing, students drew together analysis and reflections of theory, practice and self. The programme's concerns about students' success rate in the integrated assignment led to the publication of a detailed guide for students and subsequently a text book offering general advice on writing such assignments (Watson, 2002). Watson identifies some of the features of practice-based writing which commonly cause difficulties, such as the requirement to draw together theory and reflection upon students' own practice. A chapter representing the experiences of students suggests that there were specific expectations of the integrated assignment which contradicted the students' previous experiences of academic writing and contained implicit expectations relating to the importance of reflection. Students who had undertaken the

'integrated assignment' identified the tension between adhering to perceived academic conventions and including reflection, commenting that:

In completing the integrated assignment, our experiences were quite different. One assignment passed on first submission, and one failed. While the markers acknowledged that the failing assignment was 'academic work of a high standard', it failed because it did not meet the assessment criteria – ... because there was insufficient evidence of reflection on practice incorporated into the work. (Watson, 2002, p. 200)

Watson, therefore makes an important contribution, not only in flagging up concerns within the UK about social work writing, but also in highlighting a particular difficulty. Watson's work suggests a response based upon providing students with detailed guidance to a specific writing task but, unlike research in the US, does not also emphasise the importance of developing skills through writing and feedback within a particular genre.

Beyond the work of Heron and Murray (2004) and Watson (2002), there has been no published research in the UK problematising the nature of social work writing or exploring the student experience of participating in it. However research centring on other practice-based disciplines and from the broader context of academic writing discussed above suggests that there are important issues to explore. One such issue is the way in which the requirements to reflect upon practice in the context of academic learning affect institutional expectations of student writing.

2.5.1 Reflective practice in social work education

A common theme arising from the literature reviewed above and concerned with academic writing in social work education, is the importance of students

drawing together academic learning and practice, or in other words embedding learning in real experiences through reflection. Reflective learning has an established place within social work education and there is abundant literature aimed at both social work educators and students on the subject (Martyn, 2000; Gould and Baldwin, 2004). Reflective practice has a similarly high profile in the related professional disciplines of teaching and nursing. The place of reflection was established as a core aspect of assessment in social work education through the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work (CCETSW) requirement that students *demonstrate that they have ...reflected upon and critically analysed their practice* (CCETSW, 1995). The national occupational standards for the social work degree, set by the Qualifications Assurance Agency in Higher Education, reflect the CCETSW requirement. Whilst being less prescriptive about the method of assessment, the QAA subject benchmark includes 'reflection on performance' as a key element of learning, defined as:

*... a process in which a student **reflects on past experience, recent performance, and feedback**, and applies this information to the process of integrating awareness (including awareness of the impact of self on others) and new understanding, leading to improved performance. (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2000) [my emphasis].*

The importance of reflection became firmly established in social work pedagogy through the influence of authors such as Kolb (1970), Schön (1989) and Eraut (1994) but self-reflection, in fact, has much deeper roots in the profession. Reflective practice, in all but name, has been a cornerstone of social work education since its early psychoanalytic roots. It can be traced back to the psychoanalytic origins of social work in the UK, which have had

enduring influences on the discourses which surround practice and also the pedagogies of social work. This close connection arose through the understanding and use of the concept of 'self' which is integral to practice learning. Ruch (2002) suggests that the degree of interest in reflective practice is indicative of the profession's reclaiming of the relevance of the self in practice in the context of increasing complexity of the professional task and moves towards competency methods of assessment and managerialism:

*The pivotal characteristic of reflective practice is its recognition of the breadth of knowledge accessible to an individual and in particular the attention it pays to **the non-rational as well as the rational responses to experiences**. (Ruch, 2002, p. 203) [my emphasis].*

By 'non-rational' Ruch is specifically referring to the sometimes unconscious types of knowing and experience, including emotion, which are the concern of psychoanalytic theory. This non-rational aspect of reflective practice is a form of knowledge not commonly addressed in academic learning and one which could be seen as an anathema to researchers working within a positivist frame. But, while there is considerable literature concerned with developing student practitioner's skills in reflective practice, few have focused on the consequent implications for academic writing, Boud (1999) being a notable exception (see 2.5.2 below).

Whilst social work in the UK as elsewhere, inevitably operates in a highly politicised environment and practice is influenced and guided by organisational change, shadows of its psychoanalytic foundations remain interwoven through its pedagogy. Up to the early 1980s, psychoanalytic perspectives in social work education were not only important as influences on casework, but also influenced the nature of social work education:

Self-knowledge has been stressed as a desirable objective in social work education for several decades...In psychoanalysis the self-knowledge of the analyst, acquired through his own analysis, is essential. A weaker version of this was adopted for social work. (Timms, 1977, p. 4) [my emphasis].

This 'weaker version' could be seen on qualifying courses in the form of modules such as 'Use of Self' (University of Bristol, 1986-7) which encouraged students to develop self awareness and an 'internal supervisor' in post-qualification practice. Although the curriculum no longer prescribes such modules, the development of skills in self-awareness and reflection continue to be required through reflective assignments outlined above in 1.2.1. (CCETSW, 1996a).

2.5.2 Reflective writing

Despite extensive interest in reflective practice (Boud et al., 1985; Yelloly and Henkel, 1995; Gould and Taylor, 1996; Payne, 1990; Martyn, 2000; Taylor and White, 2000; Boud and Solomon, 2001; Watson, 2002; Bolton, 2003), and warnings from Boud (1999) about the complexities of assessing reflective learning, there has been less research focusing on the nature and purpose of reflective *writing* in the context of written academic assessment. Reflective writing, where visible at all in the literature, appears either in the context of learning journals which may not be assessed directly (Baker and Nelson 1992; Janks, 1999; Moon, 1999b; Crème, 2000; Thorpe, 2004; Crème, 2005) or within a broader discussion of developing students' skills in reflective practice, with the writing being a tool to achieve this (Boud et al., 1985; Boud, 1999; Moon, 1999a; Moon, 2002; Moon, 2004; Oldham and Henderson, 2004).

Boud (1999), however, questions the value and integrity of assessing reflective practice at all. He suggests that professions favour the teaching of reflective skills as they support the concept of professional self-regulation, but that there are dangers in associating assessment and reflection. It is important to recognise that there is a distinction between the assessment of students' developing professional skills of reflective practice through academic writing and the merging of assessment and reflection through self-assessment. Boud suggests that conflating assessment and reflection is unhelpful as there are inherent contradictions in the nature of reflection and the nature of assessment:

Assessment involves putting forward one's best work...Reflection, on the other hand, is about exploration, understanding, questioning, probing discrepancies and so on. There is always a danger that assessment will obliterate the very practices of reflection with courses aim to promote. (Boud, 1999, p. 127).

According to Boud (1999) therefore, assessment which incorporates a judgement on students' developing ability to reflect on their practice or indeed professional development, therefore should both avoid penalising students for exposing practice which is not 'their best', whilst providing clear guidance as to what is expected in terms of '*exploration, understanding, questioning, probing discrepancies*'. Boud (1999) also emphasises the importance of taking account of the learning context when setting up reflection tasks and identifies some specific barriers to effective reflection which include intellectualising reflection, allowing or failing to protect students from making inappropriate disclosures and most significantly placing reflection in the context of writing an essay.

Moon (Moon, 1999a; Moon, 1999b; Moon, 2002; Moon, 2004) has published extensively in the area of reflective and experiential practice, and has given some consideration to issues relating to reflective writing, primarily in the context of learning journals in professional education. She advises careful planning and setting of learning objectives where such reflective writing is assessed. For example, whilst acknowledging that they frequently co-exist, she advises educators to be clear about whether journals are being used as a learning tool, in which case the *process* is central, or as an outcome, when the *product* is the main focus. Moon (2004) has also produced a pictorial conception of the reflective writing process and an illustration differentiating between descriptive and reflective writing. The implication from Moon's work is that, although reflective writing is different from the academic essay, assessment of it should not prove any more challenging, as long as academics are thoughtful about the purpose of particular pieces of writing and guide students clearly.

Educators using learning journals in professional education have expressed some ill ease about their use. Oldham and Henderson (2004) question the effectiveness of learning journals in an evaluation of their use with Masters level business studies students. Drawing on Moon (1999b) the authors evaluated the level of engagement and criticality of participants and noted that there were differences amongst the cohort. The use of a journal in itself was not considered as a problematic factor, but the authors did reflect on the possible role of prior educational experience, learning style and 'self-consciousness' as potential impediments to fuller engagement. Thorpe (2004) in a study of nursing students assessed though learning journals also raises

concerns about the effectiveness of journals. Thorpe raises similar concerns about the ability of students to move from description to practice analysis and criticality. This paper did not offer explanations for this beyond individual students' abilities in relation to reflective practice.

Creme (2003), drawing on the work of psychoanalyst Winnicott (1971), questions the apparent reluctance in academic institutions to encourage playfulness in the form of creativity. She suggests that such creativity helps to enable students learn to express their own ideas and develop criticality in their writing:

Students seem to spend too much time and energy in 'getting it right'...the tutors say, 'We want our students to behave like psychologists, historians, ...' – or whatever discipline they are in, 'We don't want to hear your opinion, we want to know that you understand these readings'. 'Don't use 'I'; you are meant to be impersonal and objective'. Students internalise these imperatives and end up trying to parrot their reading. (Crème, 2003, p. 274).

In this discussion Creme suggests that the rules governing assessed academic writing can dissuade students from investing too much of themselves in their writing or taking risks. Creme (2005) explores the use of learning journals as 'new writing' introduced by two different disciplines, a second year political anthropology course and a first year interdisciplinary course on critical reading focusing on death. Whilst Creme identified some differences in the approach taken by each course (based primarily on differences in context) there were important similarities, such as the space created for the personal to be represented in student writing. Creme suggests that learning journals provide a legitimate space for students to draw upon their experience whilst developing the confidence to write authoritatively.

Where such journals are assessed, however, Creme suggest that the need to create a final product can be unhelpful for some students:

However, students many find this separation between 'writer' and 'product' difficult to see, especially those lacking in confidence, as support tutors frequently see (see for example, Lillis, 2001). Student writers can invest what they feel is a good deal of 'themselves' in their writing and can feel wounded when it is not well received. It is a long and arduous process, rarely completed, to become detached from what we produce, and not to feel criticized as a person for it. (Crème, 2005, p. 292)

This comment has great resonance in the context of this thesis because social work students are required to invest so much of themselves in their writing that the 'product' that is assessed can indeed become very emotionally charged. Data discussed in chapters 6 and 7 illustrate the ways in which feedback from tutors, which could be interpreted as relating only to the mechanics or organisation of students' writing, is construed as deeply personal criticism. The following quotation from Creme (2005) conveys well the challenge posed by assessing personal writing, such as learning journals and the reflective writing undertaken by social work students:

In the case of learning journals, the sense of a relationship between writer and text seems particularly close, as the student quote expresses, 'She felt that her record of study in some way exposed herself, and that with this kind of vulnerability a formal assessment would be an insult.' Only if it were not 'judged' could she feel able to be 'honest'. (Crème, 2005, p. 293)

The influence of reader judgement, through assessment, on the writer's ability to freely and honestly express themselves is a significant theme in this thesis. Creme's work provides an insight into both the restrictive influence of academic genres, such as the essay, and of the outcome of writing being for assessment rather than for self-reflection and learning.

Taylor (2003) is an unusual voice in the literature in questioning reflective practice itself, but in doing so she demonstrates a keen interest in what is happening within the texts of reflective writing. Whilst not denying the value of practitioners being thoughtful about their practice, Taylor questions whether reflective writing does in fact give access to *an authentic self and a more real account of practice* (Taylor, 2003, p. 12) and suggests that complacency about such authenticity risks the genre escaping critical analysis. In particular Taylor expresses the concern that the narrative nature of reflective writing sidesteps critical analysis of the identities and social realities presented within the text, as they are taken for granted as part of the lived experience of the author. In her challenging discussion Taylor illustrates the hidden complexities and academic rigour potentially involved in reflective writing.

Interestingly, although reflective writing is routinely used with undergraduate social workers, much of the research relating to reflective writing and journaling has been based on postgraduate studies, suggesting that it is a writing skill associated with higher order cognitive skills. Hoadley-Maidment (2000) and Jasper (2005) endorse this view, suggesting that the skills developed in reflective writing are just those required in research, such as creativity, transferability of learning, critical thinking and analysis. The academic rigour of reflective writing, together with the potential pitfalls in assessing it call into question why and how reflective writing is used in undergraduate social work studies. Although an explanation of 'why' is provided by the curriculum guidance from CCETSW and latterly the GSCC in the National Occupational Standards and Regulations for Training for Social Work and QAA Benchmark statement for Social Work (outlined in chapter 1),

this does not help us understand the impact that it has on students. This thesis explores not only the pedagogic challenge of reflective writing (chapter 6) but also the emotional impact of engaging in assessed writing in which the writer's personal experience and identity is so much at the foreground (chapter 7).

2.6 'Risky writing'

While research into the student experience of participating in reflective writing appears limited, an interesting comparison can be drawn with debates about the use of 'personal' or 'expressionist' writing in the US. Berman (2001) evaluates the benefits, risks and practices surrounding what he terms 'risky writing'. His research draws upon the practice of composition students in the US undertaking 'personal writing' or 'expressionist writing'. Personal writing developed in the 1960s and involved students writing assessed academic memoirs. Although not undertaken in the context of professional education, 'personal writing' or 'expressionist writing' shares with reflective writing the importance of the writers drawing upon their own personal or professional experience. The purpose of each form of writing is a little different, the personal writing being undertaken in order to develop the writer's skills in conveying their ideas in writing whilst reflective writing is generally employed to develop the writer's reflective skills. This is necessarily a very loose distinction, as the term 'reflective writing' is used to refer to writing which may or may not be assessed and which may be required of students for different reasons, as discussed above in 2.5.2.

The use of 'personal writing' or 'expressionist writing' in composition courses is a practice that has been criticised within the US both for being politically ineffective, as it fails to develop critical minds, and academically ineffectual as it focuses on the subjective and personal rather than an objective analysis. Supporters of personal writing, such as Peter Elbow take a different view:

Personal expressive writing happens to be one among many registers or discourses we can use for academic duty. Because personal writing invites feeling it does not mean that it leaves out thinking (Elbow, 1990 cited in Berman, 2001, p. 26).

Beside criticisms of being 'non-academic' and 'politically numbing', (Berman 2001), Berman challenges the view that personal writing is non-academic, suggesting that:

... personal writing can be among the most intellectually rigorous genres, demanding self-discipline and self-criticism. (Berman, 2001, p. 27)

Whilst defending justifications for personal writing, Berman raises the question of how a teacher should respond to self-disclosure of highly sensitive experiences such as abuse. This is particularly pertinent for the kinds of reflective writing undertaken by social work students, in which they may not only be writing about experiences of working with emotive topics such as abuse or discrimination, but may also write about their own personal experiences.

Berman, in common with Boud (1999), discourages the grading of personal writing beyond a broad 'pass / fail' to indicate participation, but where assignments are assessed he provides some guidance for assessors.

Berman, in common with Waller (2000), discussed above in 2.4, focuses on

the need for tutors to employ a sensitive approach to responding to expressive writing. He suggests that a teacher who keeps a focus on the technicality of the writing may appear cold, whilst entering into dialogue about the experience may risk over-stepping professional boundaries. He proposes that teachers should employ empathy and avoid critique or contestation because to do otherwise would imply that this is based on the misleading assumption (as in psychoanalysis) that the therapist / teacher knows more about the subject than the writer/ analysand. Berman stresses that empathy does not necessarily imply agreement, but instead an understanding of another's world.

The work of researchers such as Berman (2001), Waller (2000) and Boud (1999), although not all concerned specifically with the writing of student social workers, all identify the importance of student/tutor dialogue where writing involves the student sharing personal information. Within the helping professions sharing personal information has a particular significance and is sometimes referred to as self-disclosure. This important relationship between the student writer and tutor will be discussed in chapters 6 and 7.

2.7 Self-disclosure

The concept of self-disclosure has its roots in sociological perspectives on human interaction; the existence or degree of self-disclosure being based upon normative behaviour relating to the level of intimacy between individuals. Goffman (1963), was one of the first researchers to explore self-disclosure and suggested that conditions for the relative appropriateness of self-

disclosure depended upon both the social context and the nature of the social relationship. Chelune (1979) proposed the following definition:

The term self-disclosure has been loosely used to describe the degree to which persons reveal information about themselves to another, including their thoughts, feelings, and experiences... Self-disclosure includes any information exchange that refers to the self, including personal states, dispositions, events in the past, and plans for the future. (Chelune, 1979, p. 152)

Normative approaches to self-disclosure suggest that making disclosures can help maintain cultural values by regulating expected social behaviour and also serve individuals' instrumental goals, dependant on the power relations involved. Chelune's exploration of the functions of self-disclosure concluded that it is a potential powerful tool, the impact of which depends upon the context and relationships within which it is used. Chelune (1979) refers to three important aspects of self-disclosure which impact upon its function.

Firstly the 'normative' nature of the context in which self-disclosure takes place, or in other words how socially acceptable or common-place self-disclosure is. For example it may be more socially acceptable to share intimate or personal information with your GP than with a shop assistant. The second factor is the 'expressive value' of the self-disclosure, how honest, detailed and significant to the teller the information is. The same piece of information may have a very different meaning or significance depending upon who discloses it and who receives it. For example a disclosure of a bereavement may be relatively insignificant if the death was long ago, concerned a person to whom the teller was not emotionally close, or even if although the death was significant, the information is given in such a way as to protect the teller through humour or other defences. The third feature is

'voluntariness'. This relates to the power balance between the teller and listener and whether the self-disclosure arises from independent volition (maybe arising from trust or some other motivation which benefits the teller) or from a degree of compulsion. Members of less powerful groups may disclose more intimate information than they receive, thereby increasing their vulnerability to influence (Kelvin, 1977 and Henley, 1973 and 1977 cited in Chelune, 1979):

... it should be noted that social norms may inhibit self-disclosure and isolate individuals from one another. For instance, males may be expected to avoid self-disclosure, particularly in areas that emphasis personal concerns, weakness, and emotional difficulties. (Chelune, 1979, p. 164)

Within the therapeutic context, and that of mental health in particular (Roger, 1962; Jourard, 1971) self-disclosure is a foundational concept which originally referred only to information flowing to the helper from the service user. Self-disclosure is used in psychoanalysis to refer to the sharing of personal information, particularly in the context of an analysand sharing information with a analysand. In this context such personal information is shared with great caution, but in the belief that such exchanges can potentially build trust within a confidential, therapeutic relationship (Sticker and Fisher, 1990). The discussion in this section is particularly significant as social work students are required to engage in such disclosure in the context of assessment, which is neither confidential nor necessarily a trusting context.

2.8 Conclusion

In this conclusion I draw together two broad issues which have arisen from this overview of research which are relevant to the study of student writing in social work education. Firstly, the research outlined here relating to academic literacies provides a socially orientated perspective within which to talk about student writing. This perspective recognises the importance of several aspects of social context, encompassing both the individual (writer / addressee) and the institution, including power based institutional practices and disciplinarity. Critical work on inconsistent institutional practices (Lea, 1998; Lea and Street, 2000) and the multi-disciplinary nature of practice-based subjects such as social work will be used to explore both the nature of the writing tasks set and the expectations of students' writing (through both course guidance and tutor feedback). I have also drawn from this body of work the concept of 'writing practice' as a tool to talk about the range of activities associated with student writing, focusing on emotion, circularity, and human interaction as outlined in 2.3.

The second broad area that has been influential on this thesis is research relating specifically to writing in social work and reflective writing in associated practice-based learning. This work raises some important areas warranting further exploration relating to the self and emotionality in writing. The importance of a visible self in social work writing stems from the centrality of values and reflection on one's own practice within the discipline of social work. Whilst this has an impact on the expectations of how student social workers write, the consequences resulting from inconsistencies with more

traditional academic ways of writing have been little recognised. These include the challenges posed for both writer and assessor when academic writing involves personal experience but also the importance, for social work in particular, of developing visible conventions of writing which permit the visibility of the author. The centrality of the self in writing, and the challenges which this poses for the writer and assessor, have led me to have a particular interest in building on the social dimension of student writing through exploring the interpersonal and psychological dimensions. The particular profile of social work students (broadly mature, women learners) adds an important perspective on individual experiences highlighted by Lillis's (2001) work with non-traditional students.

In the following chapter I draw upon established research relating to writer identity from a sociological perspective and explore how this might be enhanced by psychological perspectives on identity. As identity represents a significant body of work which is central to this thesis, this discussion will be the sole focus of chapter 3.

3. Chapter three: Identity in writing

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the relationship between identity and student writing. I will begin by outlining the significance of identity to the study of writing generally and student writing in particular. Drawing upon the ideas of Althusser (1969), Foucault (1972; 1979), Sarup (1996), Hall (1996) and Hall and Maharaj (2001), I will present a perspective on identity which recognises the positioning of individuals in relation to both institutions and others. I will then explore the contributions of influential theorists on writer identity working from a sociological frame, in particular the work of Ivanič (Ivanic, 1996; Clark and Ivanic, 1997; Ivanič, 1998, Ivanič, 2006). Through examining this body of work I will explore the possibilities for applying psychological and psychoanalytic ideas on identity and the self to gain a greater understanding of the relationship between identity and the student writer.

3.2 Theorising social identity: the relevance of identity to academic writing

In 2.2.4, I outlined Bazerman's four contexts pertinent to analysing texts (2004). Lea (2002) suggests that, of the four, identities warrant a more extensive exploration. She suggests that the issue of identity and personhood is particularly relevant to certain forms of writing undertaken in practice-based education, where there is potential conflict between the identity of the student as professional apprentice and the student as academic apprentice (Lea,

2002). One of the themes arising from the literature on writing in practice-based education (discussed in 2.3.1) is the way in which professional and academic ways of being, or identities, interact. This is particularly pertinent where students undertake writing tasks in which they are expected to draw upon practice or even personal experience alongside more traditional academic learning, as is frequently the case in writing undertaken on practice-based courses such as social work. The study of identity is a broad area which has been approached from many disciplinary perspectives including sociology, psychology and philosophy. Some of the most influential perspectives over the past half-century has resulted from the writings of Foucault (1972; 1979), Althusser (1969) and more recently Hall (1996) and Hall and Maharaj, (2001).

3.3 Identity as ‘subject’: the influence of radical social theory

The work of Foucault (1972; 1979), provides a perspective on identity and society which underpins the work of researchers central to my exploration of identity and writing including Ivanič (1997), Clark and Ivanič (1997), Henriques et al. (1998) and Frosh (1991; 2002). As a result this work has been very influential on my thesis, despite the otherwise divergent disciplines informed by these key works. For this reason I give an overview of Foucault’s key ideas here.

One of Foucault’s major contributions has been his analysis of knowledge-power relations and the interaction of multiple discourses (Foucault 1972;

Foucault 1979). Foucault's theorisation of the concept of 'discourse' developed through the course of his work, but in simple terms concerns the ways in which knowledge and its communication take place within society and influence social structures. According to Strydom (2000), Foucault's emphasis moved from representing discourse as 'autonomous and constitutive of reality' (Strydom, 2000, p. 36) towards a concern with the impact of power:

He sought to show that discourse does not constitute reality but rather that discursive knowledge is actually produced in the service of expanding social power which increasingly penetrates modern institutions like prisons, armies, schools factories and so forth. (Strydom, 2000, p. 36).

Foucault's emphasis on institutional power provides us with concepts to talk about the ways in which institutions and institutional practices impact upon the 'subjects' who relate to them. Foucault uses the term 'subject' to refer to the individual in relation to institutions and discourses. He suggests that subjects are influenced by discourses and also by their position in relation to institutions (Foucault, 1972). Whilst Foucault's central interest is not 'identity', his discussion of the process of subjugation through discourses played out in institutions is relevant here. Foucault argues that it is through 'struggles' against the power enacted through institutions that individuals are able to assert their individuality and to challenge the processes or techniques of subjugation;

This (modern) form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorises the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognise and by which others have to recognise him. (Foucault, 1983, p. 212)

Foucault's work, therefore foregrounds the key concepts of power, discourses and the inter-relationship between individuals (or in his terms subjects) and institutions. He recognises that ideology subjugates individuals not only through discourse but also in the physical and active manifestations of particular discourses;

Take for example an educational institution: the disposal of its space, the meticulous regulations which govern its internal life, the different activities which are organised there, the diverse persons who live there or meet one another... ensures apprenticeship and the acquisition of aptitudes or types of behaviour is developed there by means of a whole ensemble of regulated communications (lessons, questions and answers, orders, exhortations, coded signs of obedience, differentiation marks of the 'value' of each person and of the levels of knowledge. (Foucault, 1983, p. 282)

Foucault presents us, therefore, with a conceptual framework to view the relationship between identity and individuals' relationships and interaction with institutions which either place them as a subject, endowed with the identity prescribed by the dominant institutional discourse, or in a position of struggle. The above quotation provides an image of the potential breadth of institutional practices which regulate the expected role of subjects; individuals can either conform by adopting and internalising such roles and practices or adopt a position of struggle and challenge. This latter position will have consequences, however, due to the powerful nature of these institutional activities.

For the purposes of this thesis, I conceptualise the relevance of discourse based on the work of Henriques et al. (1998) (discussed in 3.8.4). Briefly, this work recognises the significance of discourses to the development of identities but also in human interaction. Consequently the relevance of

particular discourses (which may be interconnected) arise from specific social contexts and the individuals interacting within them. I am also particularly concerned with the student as a subject of the institution of the university, and the ways in which students and tutors are positioned in relation to each other and to the discourses generated through the institution of the university. A further layer, however, arises from the particular discipline studied; social work is not only an academic field but also a profession closely allied to the nation state. The profession of social work influences the experience of students through their practice learning but also through the stipulation and regulation of the curriculum against which they are assessed. A clear example of this is the Code of Practice for social care workers. This document provides a:

...list of statements that describe the standards of professional conduct and practice required of social care workers as they go about their daily work. (Department of Health, 2002, p. 3)

The Code of Practice is published by the General Social Care Council, a government appointed organisation responsible for regulating social care and social work in England. The Code is one value-based element of the curriculum against which students must demonstrate understanding and compliance in assessed academic work as well as through their practice. This emphasis on professional values is an added dimension to the university and disciplinary ideologies encountered by all students in higher education. Social work values form a compulsory ideology which touches individual identity in a very intimate way through its focus on beliefs and values as well as action.

The first of six areas covered by the code states that:

As a social care worker, you must protect the rights and promote the interests of service users and carers.

- *This includes:*
- *Treating each person as an individual;*
- *Respecting and, where appropriate, promoting the individual views and wishes of both service users and carers;*
- *Supporting service users' rights to control their lives and make informed choices about the services they receive;*
- *Respecting and maintaining the dignity and privacy of service users;*
- *Promoting equal opportunities for service users and carers; and*
- *Respecting diversity and different cultures and values.*

(DOH, 2002, p. 14-15)

This item of the Code (which is still current) requires social workers to adopt a uniform approach to valuing the beliefs and behaviour of others which recognises the power that social workers hold as agents of the state as well as the inequalities in society. It also represents a particular ideology, endorsed by the state, to which social work students are compelled to comply in order to achieve their professional and academic qualification. This thesis questions some of the implications for students of complying with a clear example of ideological subjugation or, in other words, of conforming to particular ways of belief and action aligned to state and institutional power.

3.4 Subjects and institutions

3.4.1 Ideological subjugation

Hall (1996), building on the work of Foucault, proposes that identities are a product of both discourse and power and as such are constructed through difference (Hall, 1996, p. 3). To represent this relational aspect of identity, Hall uses the term 'identification' to indicate the way in which subjects recognise sameness or difference between themselves and others (1996, p. 4).

Althusser's context for discussing ideology is focused on the relationship between the individual and institutions closely aligned to the power of the state. This creates useful resonances relevant to higher education and to student writing in that there is a clear recognition of 'education' as an ideology-based institution. In universities ideologies may not be entirely controlled by the state and may in fact challenge the ideology of the state, but nonetheless retain power and a close relationship with state ideologies through for example funding, research and educational policies. Althusser's essay (Althusser, 1969), together with the work of Foucault, therefore provides a theoretical framework for thinking about the relationship between subjects and powerful institutions, in this case students and universities, which make important links between ideology, identification, power relationships and institutional practices.

3.4.2 Beyond class-based identification

Althusser's primary concern, in common with Marx, was class-based hierarchies based on an essentially Eurocentric perspective. The influence of

gender and ethnicity do not appear to be accounted for as factors influencing identification. A broader approach has been developed by Sarup (1996) who places the identity debate in the context of post-structuralism and challenges to Marxist ideology based upon a unified *class* consciousness. In presenting the ideas of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Sarup suggests that:

... class essentialism must give way to the pluralist demands of the new social movements, the new Communities of interest; these include groups concerned with anti-racism, environmentalism, feminism, gay rights, lesbianism, peace and so forth (Sarup, 1996, pp. 55-6)

This suggests that in a post-structuralist approach to society identification remains strongly influenced by institutions, but there is more diversity of institutions. With a diverse spectrum of possible ideologies with which to identify, individuals take subject positions which may reflect oppositional or associative identifications. Unlike the work stemming from a Marxist tradition, Sarup presents us with a less passive individual, able to respond consciously to multiple sources of influence. Sarup illustrates the fluidity of this experience:

Our identities are multiple and mobile. Though the process of change dissolves the fixed, stable, homogeneous identities of the past, it also opens the possibility of new articulations – the construction of new identities, the production of new subjects. (Sarup, 1996, p. 57)

Sarup continues to consider Laclau's discussion of the relationship between identity and oppression, suggesting that the interdependence of aspects of identity results in contradictions. He uses the illustration of a subject identifying with an ethnic minority group: in order for the oppositional ethnic minority identity to exist there also needs to be identification with the 'nation' in which the minority is oppressed, otherwise there would be integration and

this oppositional identity would cease to exist. Where the subject identifies with such contradictory elements, they are in effect experiencing identification with both the oppressor and the oppressed:

If the oppressed is defined by its difference from the oppressor, such a difference is an essential component of the identity of the oppressed. But in that case, the latter cannot assert its identity without asserting that of the oppressor as well. (Sarup, 1996, p. 60).

This concept is well illustrated in the research of Janks (1999) in the context of a Critical Language Awareness course for lecturers in South Africa. One case study, Mpho, illustrates how as a black African woman (who was educated in a former Bantu education school) she identifies herself in the context of a historically white university. She adopts the construct of being academically needy and disadvantaged and responds to this, even as a lecturer, by being submissive and non-confrontational. Hence her identity as a black woman incorporates her identity as a South African, as represented by the oppressive attitudes acted out within the University. Mpho asks herself:

As an academic do I become objective and detach myself from such experiences and analyse them or do I explore my subjective feelings and respond at a personal level. Is my objectivism one way of silencing me? What other things are silencing me in this institution, should I look beyond the institution for answers. How do I get my voice back? How do I develop a voice? (Cited in Janks, 1999, p. 233).

This illustrates both how the oppressed individual internalises the identity of the oppressor, and also the way in which the culture and practices of the university can act as a powerful agent in regulating the voices not only of students but of academic staff also.

Janks suggests that cultural practices and conflicts with respect to identification also exist within particular discourses. Janks draws upon Gee's imagery of discourses representing an:

'Identity kit' which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognise. (Gee, 1990, p. 142 Cited in Janks, 1999, p. 232).

Reflecting upon her research participants, Janks continues by observing that:

Unlike clothes, which can be altered, it is they who have to change to fit the discourse, if they hope to acquire it. (Janks, 1999).

The complexity of identifications are well represented in this thesis, with blurred distinctions in relation to, for example, students foregrounding their social class, ethnicity and culture as relevant to their writing (see 6.4, 7.2.1, 7.3.1 and 7.6). There is also a connection with the way in which the practice learning course requires compliance with a set of values prescribed by a government body responsible for setting the curriculum.

3.5 Otherness and translation

Hall (Hall and Maharaj 2001), sharing Janks and Sarup's concern for identity and difference, introduces the concept of 'otherness'. He suggests that all identities have in common the fact that they are culturally constructed and that they always exist in the context of opposites or 'otherness'. By this Hall is referring to the idea that an identity can be determined as much by the ways in which it differs from others as by any commonalities. Hence dialogue is influenced as much by what is not there, what is not shared or understood as by what is there between two parties. He develops this concept to suggest

that all aspects of identity have a relational 'other', or lack some element which he describes as the 'relational other'. One important feature of the relational other is that, as all identities are created within a context of power, each has a relative power in relation to any other identity. Hall draws on Lacan, working in the psychoanalytic tradition particularly relevant to this thesis, to illustrate his point by suggesting that:

The 'truth' of the Lacanian insight is that the subject is constructed across a 'lack', the self by its 'others'. This is for me an absolutely fundamental point, as it implies that within ourselves, within the terms of a meaning, we are always inadequate. We cannot complete ourselves. We are always open to that which is other or different from ourselves, which we cannot encapsulate into ourselves, draw into our field of meaning or representation. (Hall in Hall and Maharaj, 2001, p. 27)

In this statement Hall recognises identity as intrinsically relational and also as incorporating difference in an essential way. There are many implications of Hall's analysis of identity and otherness for writer identity beyond the commonly accepted notion that identities are constructed through social discourse and are relational. Hall's analysis of the relational nature of identity (Hall, 1996; Hall and Maharaj, 2001) also provides a useful conceptual frame for thinking about individual interactions. Drawing on Bakhtin (1981), Lacan and Saussure, Hall (2001) suggests that all texts and conversations are both embedded in and dependent upon cultural practices, and that individuals' experiences and interpretations of such cultural practices differ, resulting in 'cultural translation'. This means that, in the context of student texts, the reader and author are both involved in a 'cultural translation' and their translations will differ more the greater the cultural differences there are between the individuals. Hall's use of the word 'cultural' is very broad and

suggests that the cultural (or social) context of each person is unique to that individual. This makes all dialogue a form of translation which, as the addressee translates based upon their own cultural perspective, is always imperfect. Hall, drawing on Bakhtin, argues that one feature of dialogue is that it has no clear beginning or end. This is because an understanding of any one dialogue is always influenced by what passed before and will pass after it, although endings and beginnings can be artificially imposed. Texts and other forms of communication are the same in this respect; they also share the feature of having no 'pure' or culturally untainted beginning or end, they are always interpretations.

Hall's discussion of translation provides an important perspective on texts and identity. Inevitable cultural differences between reader and writer will result in differences in understanding of meaning. Hall is suggesting that meaning-making, and interpretation of that meaning-making, is *inevitably* a site for imperfect translation and for the enactment of power differences as represented in identity. This perspective has particular relevance when considering Lillis's research with non-traditional students (Lillis 2001) in which she is also concerned with writer identities. Lillis's research demonstrated the impact of identity positions deriving from the student role, gender, social class and ethnicity, all of which provided examples of relational powerlessness. Lillis (2001) relates Foucault's discussion of regulatory practices to student writing, suggesting that 'essayist literacy' (see 2.2.3) is one such practice to which students are expected to conform, even if conforming creates internal identity conflict. Lillis uses examples from her work with non-traditional student writers to illustrate how they are inclined to minimise or exclude

aspects of 'themselves' which they perceive as being contrary to the social practice of essayist literacy in the university. Taking Hall's analysis to its fullest extent would suggest, however, that all subject positions or identities involve relational power dynamics which will impact on dialogue and that all subject positions or identities result in imperfect communication of meaning. Power dynamics and the complexities of meaning-making, therefore, become relevant for all student writers.

My aim in this chapter thus far has been to draw together some of the key sociologically orientated themes from extensive bodies of work which, although necessarily presented very briefly here, are central to this thesis. Firstly this section has located student writing as communicative acts taking place in universities, which are ideologically based institutions. As subjects of the university, students will be positioned (or position themselves) differently with their relations influenced not only by culture but also by power deriving from factors such as class, gender and heritage. The nature of social work (as a field of study and a profession) involves students in an unusual level of engagement with the relationship between identity and ideology, particularly in relation to the assessment of values. These differences build individual identities through not only what is common but also differences or imbalances in power. These cultural differences impact on not only the ways in which identifications take place but also communicative acts, including the writing, reading and exchange of student writing. These themes have been picked up with specific reference to student writing and recur throughout the thesis. I now turn to focus on the work of one theorist who has provided an influential sociological analysis of writer identity, Roz Ivanič. I focus in some detail on

this work as Ivanič shares with me not only an interest in academic student writing and identity but also an interest in social work because her work includes a case study of one writer studying for a social work qualification.

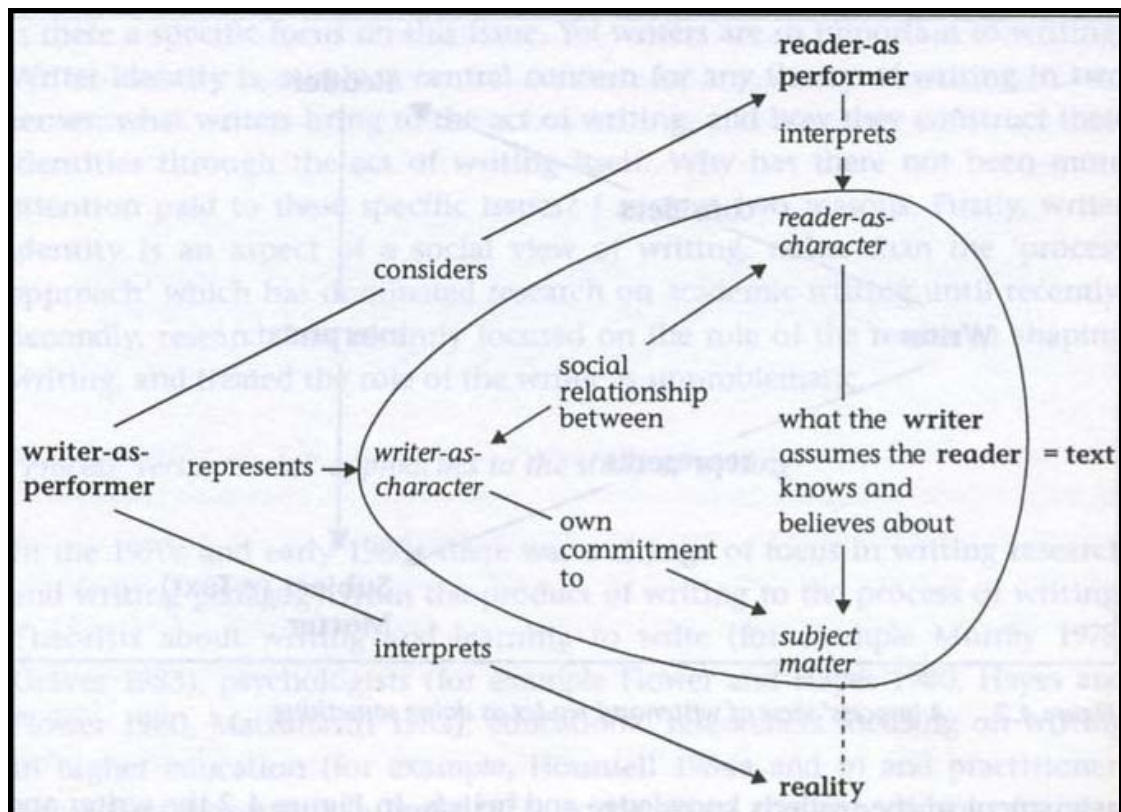
3.6 Writing and identity: Roz Ivanič

Ivanič (Clark and Ivanič, 1997; Ivanič, 1998; Ivanič, 2006), whose work has been referred to in 2.3 in discussion of academic writing, has provided a significant contribution to research on the relationship between identity and student writing. This work has drawn primarily on sociological and also post-structuralist perspectives on identity referred to above. Ivanič's theorisation takes account of radical social theorists' ideas on subjects, institutions and discourse but also draws upon social constructionism (discussed below in 3.6) to offer a theory of writer identity. In her recent paper Ivanič (2006) draws upon 'activity theory' (AT), a systemic approach in which:

The AT representation of human activity does not use the word 'identity', but it specifies 'Subjects' as one of the three main elements in an activity system: people – the participants, the social actors in the activity. (Ivanič, 2006, p. 6).

In doing so Ivanič builds upon the 'process' model of writing, which is concerned with writers *actions or behaviour* in the process of producing texts, and instead opens up debate on how writers' 'being' is represented in the texts which they produce (Ivanič, 1997, p. 98). Ivanič describes this move from 'doing' to 'being' as a theoretical move from a 'process' view of writer and reader to a 'social' view. Ivanič differentiates between the 'writer as performer' involved in process tasks and the 'writer as character', through whom the writer portrays aspects of the self.

Figure 12: A 'social' view of writer and reader as both doing something and being represented in the text (Ivanic 1997 p. 96)



In Figure 12, Ivanic illustrates the way in which the production of a text is influenced by the writer both considering the anticipated interpretation of the reader and also the writer's own interpretation of reality. Thus the 'writer-as-performer' makes choices in relation to the production of the text and through this process s/he represents him/herself within the text as the writer-as-character. The writer-as-character, therefore, provides an insight into the writer's social relationship with the reader, the writer's views on the subject matter but also the writer's perception of the reader's views on the subject matter. Thus the writer is not only acting out their own position in relation to the subject matter through the text, but mediating this position based upon their perception of the reader's position. Ivanic suggests that this

communicative act, as suggested by Hall (2001), involves an *interpretation* of the social realities of both writer and reader.

In her theorisation of identity, Ivanič (1998) draws upon social constructionist theories represented by Gergen (Gergen and Davis, 1985; Gergen, 1991) and social role theory developed by Goffman (Goffman, 1969). Her work also applies the work of Halliday (1978; 1994) and Fairclough (1989), who have provided influential approaches to text analysis and researching language and identity. These works derive primarily from sociological world views and are used by Ivanič to construct a framework for exploring the ways in which elements of an individual's social identity are both played out within texts and influence the writer's literacy practices.

Ivanič's framework (see Figure 13) draws upon Goffman's dramaturgical concept of individuals' identity deriving from the diverse social roles that they play through participation in social interactions, or 'scenes'. Her theorisation of social roles in the context of writing suggests that writers play out three aspects of 'self' in writing; the autobiographical self, the discoursal self and the authorial self:

- The **autobiographical self** relates to the writer's personal history including past and present experiences, values and beliefs. The autobiographical self is therefore necessarily variable as it will evolve alongside individual experiences. Ivanič suggests that it is the autobiographical self which lies behind a writer's text although it may not be clearly visible and can be either conscious or subconscious. In fact in academic writing, characterised as objective, there may be an

expectation that the autobiographical self does not appear in the text (Ivanic 1997 p. 168-9). This is an issue that I will return to in relation to assessed reflective writing undertaken in the context of social work education which requires the writer to not only recount personal experiences but also explore personal values and beliefs.

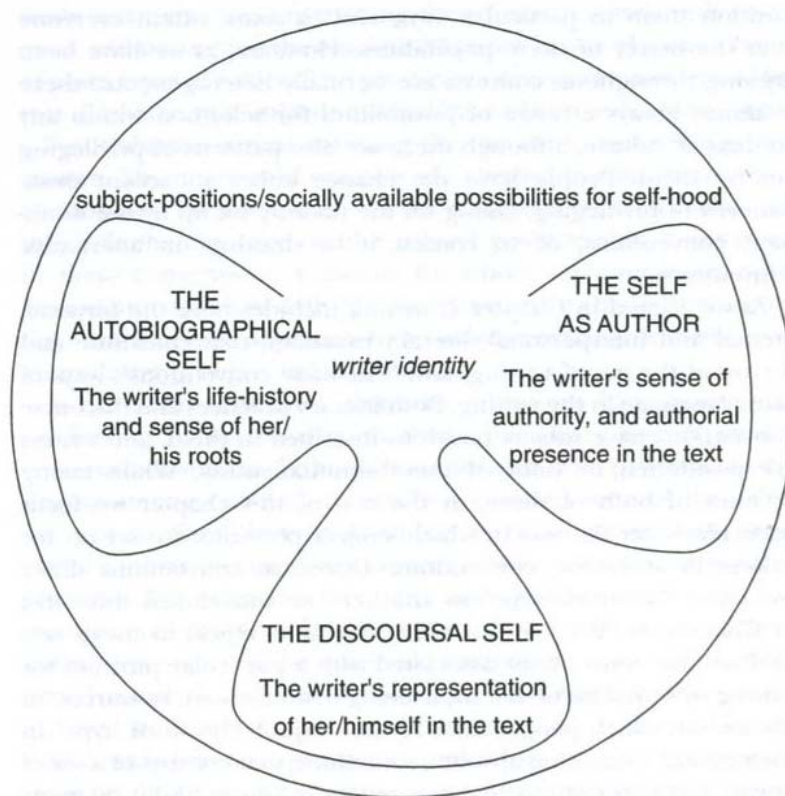


Figure 13 Ivanič's aspects of writer identity (Clark and Ivanic 1997p. 137)

- The **discoursal self**, or more accurately discoursal selves, on the other hand are identifiable in the text. The discoursal self acts out the various discourses which are available to the writer. In Ivanič's words:

A writer's 'discoursal self' is the impression – often multiple, sometimes contradictory – which they consciously or unconsciously convey of themselves in a particular written text. (Ivanič, 1998, p. 25).

- The discourses voiced by an individual may be many and may vary depending upon the specific text. The various discoursal positions may also differ in the extent to which they are congruent with the autobiographical self.

- Where the autobiographical self is represented in the text as an authorial voice, Ivanič suggests that the writer is using the **self as author**. An important aspect of the self as author is that the writer is presenting his or her own views or perspective with an authoritative voice. As with the autobiographical voice, the regulative nature of academic conventions can make authors cautious about adopting an authoritative voice (particularly novice writers), encouraging them to rely heavily upon acknowledged published sources to construct a discussion. (*Ivanic, 1997, p. 23-30*)

Ivanič's three aspects of identity are concepts used to describe the way in which social identity is played out and represented in authors' writing. The autobiographical self is an underlying, multi-faceted and changing backcloth influencing the discursal and authorial processes. Ivanič's strongest focus is on the discursal self, or the way in which writers represent multiple discursal voices in their text which potentially conflict not only with each other but also with the values and beliefs represented by the autobiographical self.

Ivanič illustrates her discussion of the autobiographical self through the case study of Rachel, a first year social work student (*Ivanic, 1997, p. 124ff*). In this case study, discussed in more detail in 3.7, Ivanič identifies the discursal positions of Rachel as trainee social worker, as apprentice academic and as radical feminist. Of these, Rachel participates in the first two somewhat reluctantly, whilst she embraces the radical feminist discourse more enthusiastically as it maps most closely against her autobiographical self (*Ivanic, 1997, p. 156-8*). Ivanič's framework provides a tool for analysing the layers of voices within student writing. The choices that writers make about which discourses they perform in their writing depend upon both the students' familiarity with that discourse and also the influence of their autobiographical

self, which may result in conflict or resistance. In order to participate effectively in any discourse through writing the author needs to have sufficient familiarity with the language, concepts and values represented, something which Rachel again had only partially developed. An authorial voice, Ivanič suggests, does not necessarily develop even with cognisance of specialist discourse(s) but relies upon the writer having sufficient confidence to believe that their voice has validity and credence (Ivanič, 1997, p. 158).

Although Ivanič's framework draws upon Goffman's social roles theory, she acknowledges two central criticisms of his work (Ivanic, 1997, p. 20). Firstly, by suggesting that individuals are in command of their performances, Goffman appears to minimise the limitations placed on individuals' freedom to act resulting from their subject positioning or imbalances in power. Secondly, Goffman fails to acknowledge any psychological conflict arising from individuals moving between roles, giving the impression of smooth and effortless performances and overlooking the inevitable tensions and conflicts arising from both playing a series of roles and moving between them (Ivanic, 1997, p. 22). Ivanič addresses both of these criticisms, by drawing on a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionists, such as Gergen (1985; 1991), suggest that social norms which regulate individual performances result from participants reaching a shared understanding of meaning. Norms of behaviour can be changed, but only if a new consensus of meaning is achieved. Like Howard and Hollander (1997), she warns that the social constructionist approach can appear to minimise the difficulty of bringing about such changes in consensus:

In its emphasis on individual agency, this approach minimizes the constraints of social structures and the effects of power inequities. Action is always situated somewhere. The particularities of actors' genders, class positions, races and sexualities have direct material consequences for the range of actions they can envision, let alone perform. (Howard and Hollander, 1997, p. 39)

The limitations on individual agency are recognised by Ivanič and she uses a critical approach to social constructionism, drawing on Foucault (Rabinow, 1991) and Parker (1989). This position acknowledges both imbalances in power and also the ability of individuals to act autonomously to bring about change or make conscious choices about the ways in which they will engage in social interactions.

In a development of her theory of writer identity, Ivanič (2006) draws upon activity theory to suggest that the context of learning can provide a social and cultural environment in which identification can contribute to student learning and can be played out through writing. In doing so she shifts her emphasis from identity to identification as a process and also to suggest that, based on her current research, there is evidence that work-based learning environments can offer possibilities for identification which can contribute to learning. Moreover writing provides a significant site for such identification to be played out.

One of the important contributions of Ivanič's research has been to establish a clear link between student writers' texts and their social identity, building upon the well established connection between language and identity (Fairclough, 1989). Ivanič applies this work to the context of student texts and, through her use of critical social constructionist and social role theory, she provides a framework for mapping social identity through analysing text alongside talk

with the authors of texts (Ivanič, 1997, p. 41-44), recognising the two-way flow of influence between texts, individuals and their social conditions:

Figure 14: Discourse as text, interaction and content (adapted from Fairclough, 1989 by Ivanič, 1998, p. 41)

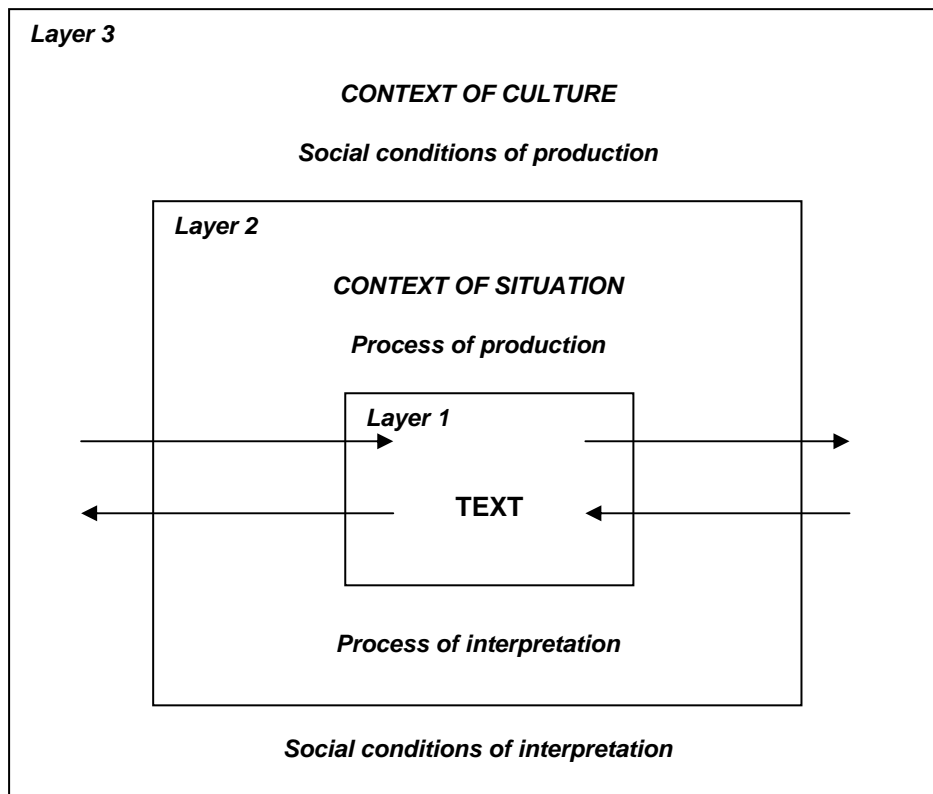


Figure 14 reproduces Ivanič's conceptualisation of discourse as text, interaction and content, adapted from the original by Fairclough (1989). Here Ivanič illustrates two layers of influence on the text, the outer layer representing the context of culture (including the social conditions of production and interpretation) and the inner layer the context of situation (consisting of the processes of production and interpretation). There is a two-way stream of influence to and from the text and these two layers. Through this framework both the discoursal context and also the meaning-making of producers of language and interpreters are recognised. Ivanič suggests that through this diagram:

Fairclough shows how a text (written or spoken) is inextricable from the processes of production and interpretation which create it, and that these processes are in turn inextricable from the various local, institutional and soci-historical conditions within which the participants are situated. (Ivanič, 1997, p. 41)

Through this conceptualisation of text production and interpretation, Ivanič is emphasising the integral significance of social context at all levels from the broad cultural though to the minutiae of the situational. These social influences are 'performed', in the main, by the writers and readers of texts. This establishes the importance, therefore, not only of social influence but of the interpretations and interaction of these key players in the creation of texts.

Ivanič's work, therefore, has foregrounded some very significant themes which I draw on through out this thesis. Most importantly, Ivanič's work establishes the place of identity in the context of student writing. Through her sociological framing of identity in texts, she offers the possibility of exploring the ways in which identity and subject positioning can both be found within texts and influence the creation of texts. This makes a crucial link between the identity of individuals and their social and cultural context but also introduces the significance of the relationship between writer and reader. These concepts underlie much of this thesis and are explored in particular detail in chapters 6 and 7.

3.7 Developing Ivanič's model of writer identity

While recognising the importance of Ivanič's framework and the specific relevance of the concepts identified above to my thesis, there are some specific aspects of writer identity which I will attempt to develop in this thesis.

This development of Ivanič's work has partly arisen out of my differing disciplinary perspective and partly from the data and findings themselves. Ivanič's academic context is that of linguistics, with a particular interest in sociological perspectives. My own background (as discussed in chapter 1) is from within the discipline of social work education as a practitioner and educator. Consequently, although Ivanič and I share an interest in the relationship between identity and writing and the broad social context of knowledge-power relations, Ivanič's interests and skills have led her towards a more text-orientated methodology, drawing upon her expertise in socio-linguistics alongside interviewing students. My research has drawn upon my discipline-specific knowledge as a social worker and social work educator and my interests in personal interaction rooted in a psychoanalytic tradition.

Drawing upon Ivanič's research (1998) and my study, I intend to offer a critical development of her framework in two areas. Firstly I take a critical approach to institutional practices from the perspective of being within a specific discipline, that of social work. As a researcher I have drawn upon my own experience as a social worker and social work lecturer, familiar with both relevant discourses and pedagogical practices, to critically evaluate institutional and course-related documents to explore the student experience of writing. Secondly, as noted above, Ivanič is primarily concerned with a sociological perspective and, as noted by Lea (Lea, 2001), does not draw upon (either to employ or to discard) theorisation from psychology or psychoanalysis. I will be suggesting that these disciplines offer perspectives which may assist in addressing some unanswered questions relating to writer identity. I will firstly address the insights drawn from my specific disciplinary

perspectives which I would suggest are helpful in gaining an understanding of student writing.

3.7.1 Institutional practices in social work writing

Ivanič's data includes a detailed case study based upon a student social worker. This data is so close to my own study that it provides a valuable opportunity to apply the disciplinary practices within social work that I have encountered. Ivanič's research recognises the relevance of disciplinary and institutional practices, particularly in the ways in which disciplinary discourses and unequal power relations can have an impact upon students' possibilities for selfhood. Here I use Ivanič's case study of Rachel to illustrate the relevance of 'insider' disciplinary awareness.

Rachel is a social work student in Ivanič's study who undertakes an assignment as part of her social work qualification. In this respect Rachel's case study has much in common with the data collected for this thesis. In the following extract, Ivanič explores the ways in which Rachel presents herself as 'student social worker' rather than 'academic student'.

Figure 15: Rachel. Extracts from Ivanič, 1998, p. 133-4

Writing social work case notes

Rachel establishes an apprentice social work identity at the very beginning of the essay. She does not start with a conventional academic introduction, outlining the structure of the paper, but with the following sentence:

Extract 6.1 (a) (lines 1-2)

I worked with family C during my Second placement with a Child Protection Agency.

This contrasts with the way she started at least one other essay in the same year:

Extract 6.1 (b)

I will first outline what is currently known about HIV/AIDS.

However, the choice of how to begin the essay was not just a difference between the nature of the assignments. The student who got the highest mark for the 'placement' essay followed the academic convention of outlining the content of the essay in her opening:

Extract 6.1 (c)

The introduction to this essay will take the form of a brief outline of the referral taken in respect of the case study I intend to look at. From then it will then be possible to examine the social work practice undertaken, the theory involved in this and the outcome of the intervention and how this might have differed if other options had been explored.

Rachel, by choosing NOT to introduce her essay in this way, identified herself as not taking an academic approach to the assignment. She started with 'I worked' — identifying herself as a student social worker by referring to her own past action. This first person, past tense verb is not typical of the discourse of social scientific essays, except possibly for the reporting of anthropological fieldwork.

Rachel and I identified lines 2-24 as having the discursual characteristics of professional social work case notes, interwoven from line 15 onwards with a more informal narrative. Of this section she said

Rachel: The first bit is quite kind of clinical isn't it — like two referrals made, prior to my involvement, it's kind of professional

What Rachel calls 'clinical' is represented by several linguistic features, particularly prevalent between lines 2 and 22. Although this section presents background information about events in the life of a family, it starts with a grammar of nouns and states rather than human agents and actions. First, there is a heading and list format for the Family composition. This is very much as it might appear in case notes at the Agency.

(Ivanič, 1998, p. 133-4)

In the above extract, Ivanič suggests that Rachel's style of opening is breaking with academic conventions and therefore an illustration of her choice to distance herself from one discursual identity (apprentice academic) and embrace her identity as student social worker. From my perspective within social work this claim is problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, it is not unconventional to use the first person extensively within social work writing. Rachel's writing appears, from Ivanič's discussion, to be an example of an assignment required of all social work courses in the UK at the time of the respective studies (see discussion in 1.2.1). Such assignments involve a very specific, complex and challenging form of reflective writing that requires the student to draw together experience from practice, personal values and

beliefs and relate these to theoretical learning from the course. As I discuss in chapter 5, it is expected that in such assignments students will use the first person so that personal and practice experience will be included, thus involving a merging of narrative and analytical text types.

I would question, therefore, whether the main reason for the essay in extract 6.1 receiving the 'highest mark' was adherence to 'social science academic conventions', despite the fact that the assignment opened in this genre. If the author continued throughout in the third person, they would not have been able to discuss and evaluate their own values and practices in an authentic voice, as required, which would in itself have attracted penalties. I would suggest that the mixture of identities appearing in Rachel's text arose as much, if not more, from the requirements of the writing task, which demanded a combination of highly personal, professional and more theoretical voices, than from Rachel's '*difficulty playing these silly games*' (Ivanič, 1998, p. 168). I also observed that as social work students are only required to undertake one such assignment in the first year of study, this is likely to be Rachel's first (and very possibly only) attempt at such an assignment in her academic career. Consequently the writing conventions presented to her in written course guidance may have differed significantly from any previous academic writing she had undertaken. These differences would also have been relevant to Rachel's self-presentation in her writing, as they would have instructed her to write in the first person and to interweave practice and personal reflections in her discussion of theory. This is not to say that Rachel's identity is not represented in the text as Ivanič suggests, but that the reasons for this are

complex and an understanding of them can also be informed by an understanding of disciplinary conventions.

This re-analysis of a small element of Ivanič's work raises some important issues. It illustrates the importance of insider knowledge and the way in which such knowledge can alter an interpretation or analysis. The significance of such insider knowledge also highlights the consequent danger of making claims about data without reference to subject- or institution-specific knowledge and also the individual interpretations of participants. Even when a researcher has such insider knowledge and has attempted to discover participants' perspectives, s/he can never be completely sure that their understanding reflects the truth as interpreted by others.

3.7.2 A sociological approach to writer identity: some unanswered questions

A fuller understanding of Rachel's writing, I would suggest, could be gained through exploring psychosocial influences on her writing, including the three aspects of writing practices introduced in 2.3 of circularity of actions, human interaction and emotion. Ivanič recognises the relevance of Rachel's emotional world when outlining her case study:

As these details of Rachel's literacy practices show, an unexpectedly wide range of factors determine what ends up in the written text, Rachel's particular configuration of practices and feelings are created by the person she is, and determine what she writes as much as the nature of the task itself and the influence of the readers. (Ivanic, 1997, p. 131)

I would agree with this statement, but add that sociological and cognitive perspectives alone limit the possibilities for exploring the range of factors to

which Ivanič alludes. Drawing upon the three aspect of writing practices (circularity, human interaction and emotion) which I presented in 2.3, Rachel's participation in this academic task also involved interaction (actual and through her thinking processes or fantasies) with her tutor and the institutions involved (her employer and the university). Such interactions draw in the ways in which Rachel *felt* about her writing practices. Her writing may have been influenced by motivations which were hard to explain or unconscious. It is through these areas of emotion and unconscious motivations that I will be exploring whether a psychoanalytic perspective can offer an additional lens through which to understand more fully experiences such as Rachel's of participating in academic writing.

My explorations of Ivanič's work with Rachel and my own data have generated two particular unanswered theoretical questions relating to writer identity:

1. To what degree is the required genre of the discipline influencing the writer's identity positions?
2. Do the social identity positions used by Ivanič provide a sufficient tool to explore the emotional aspect of student writing?

Based on my data I would suggest that these issues are important aspects of writer identity but I have not found these questions satisfactorily addressed in current literature on social work writing. In an attempt to open up these questions, in this thesis I have drawn upon psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives to identity and applied them to the context of student writing.

These are disciplines that have made major contributions to research and

theorising of identity and the self. I will argue that central to all three questions is the concept of a core self. In focusing on the self, I am attempting to mark a distinction between the aspects of social identity discussed by Ivanič (1998, p. 24) and the notion of a fixed, inner or core self, explored in some detail below in 3.8.2.

3.8 Introducing a psychosocial perspective

Ivanič provides an important starting point for exploring identity in writing. My intention here is to emphasise psychological dimensions of identity not currently foregrounded in literature on student writing identity, which I believe contribute to addressing the three questions outlined in the previous section. Although Ivanič recognises the plurality of identities, little is explained by sociological approaches to the ways in which such identities are organised or co-exist within an individual. There are extensive bodies of work in the field of sociology and psychology relating to ways in which social and personal identities intersect which I will draw upon in the following section.

3.8.1 Multiplicity and salience

The complexities associated with the workings of multiple identities are recognised by Ivanič, who identifies not only the multiplicity of identities but also the contradictions between them and the impact that this has on the player (Ivanič, 1997, p. 132ff). The discipline of social psychology contributes the concepts of *multiplicity* and *salience*, both of which provide ways to understand how multiple aspects of identity interact. Deux (1992), in acknowledging the complexities associated with drawing together the

concepts of social and personal identity, suggests that one aspect missing from much empirical research into aspects of the self is the subjective meaning attached to objectively prescribed identities and also the range of meanings that might be associated with a particular category of identity. I suggest that closely associated with the concept of multiplicity is the notion of salience. Salience, a concept originated by Bruner (1957), refers to the way in which identities relocate in the order of prominence depending upon the specific encounter or circumstances: there has been research interest in which identities are chronically (or persistently) salient, such as age or gender, and the ways in which particular identities come to prominence depending on group characteristics. This provides a useful model for exploring the ways in which aspects of student social workers' identities can influence their writing, drawing upon various personal as well as student and professional personas.

The paradigm of salience has also been used to explore the experience of first generation college students in the United States. The term 'first generation college' students or (FGC) is used in the United States to refer to a particular social group of students who are the first within their families to move beyond compulsory education. As such this group of students are considered to share a particular educational need, which could be broadly associated with the concept of non-traditional students in the UK. FGC students have been the focus of research to explore the impact of institutional practices on their identities, again a perspective relevant to non-traditional students. Orbe (2004) suggests that researchers risk distorting their findings by artificially foregrounding particular aspects of social identity which may not

reflect participants' own perceptions. This raises the importance of employing a methodology which enables participants to foreground those aspects of their identity which they see as relevant, an issue I return to in 4.7.

The concepts of salience and multiplicity assist in explaining the nature of the self and how the social and personal aspects of identity inter-relate. The work of researchers such as Frable (1997) and Orbe (2004) highlights the need for an explanation for differences in what motivates individual's experiences and actions in relation to social identities. In the context of student writing this body of work provides a useful perspective for exploring why certain aspects of identity might be foregrounded by students in a particular context and why meanings and experiences of identities vary between students undertaking parallel tasks.

3.8.2 Identity and the self

Ivanič's research foregrounds an identity divided between 'public' and 'private'. She refers to the public identities as 'person, role or persona' and to the private identities as 'identity, self or ethos' (Ivanič, 1998, p. 10). This terminology appears to conflate the terms self and identity, and raises some unanswered questions which I have found problematic in exploring my data. For example, the autobiographical self could be interpreted as an inner or fixed identity, but Ivanič is clear that this is not her intended meaning:

*This identity they bring with them to writing is itself socially constructed and constantly changing as a consequence of their developing life-history: **it is not some fixed, essential 'real self'**. (Ivanič, 1998, p. 24) [my emphasis].*

Ivanič is not explicit about whether she rejects any notion of a fixed, essential self, and it is this concept that I will explore further, particularly in relation to motivation, or desire (see discussion in 3.8.4.1). Ivanič also signals, but does not explain, the workings of the unconscious. This leaves unresolved the question of what it is; if behaviour can be unconscious (and therefore not driven by rational, cognitive thought) what is it that motivates such behaviour? Unconscious motives are recognised as existing by Ivanič (Ivanic, 1997, p. 23) but not developed. Ivanič uses the concept of the 'sub-conscious' to develop Goffman's concept of the individual moving between social roles. She suggests that in texts the author switches between the roles defined by specific discourses. For many writers, however, such behaviour is sub-conscious and evidenced through social, cognitive and physical practices as well as moment-by-moment linguistic choices (Ivanič, 1997, p. 99). I want to consider this issue in some detail, taking a psychoanalytic approach and will therefore return to it below in 3.8.4. From a theoretical perspective I will explore some possible alternative explanations of irrational motivation which I will use in my analysis of the ways in which emotion can have an impact on student writing (see 8.3.2.3). The importance of recognising both a social and an inner dimension of who we are (even if they are closely inter-related) is that avenues of exploration are opened which may be obscure when treating identity as an entirely social entity; these include the unconscious, emotionality and motivational drives which became important for explaining and understanding students' experiences in my study.

Although Ivanič conflates 'identity' and 'self', the terms have been used in social and cognitive psychology to signal very different concepts and

perspectives. Deux (1992) provides a useful overview of developments in thinking on identity and self from social psychological perspectives. In doing so, she identifies a difference in research foci between the US and Europe, which shed light on a different treatment of self and identity. Deux typifies research in the US during the 1970s and 1980s as being concerned with investigations into specific aspects of 'self' which are both abstract and socially de-contextualised. In Europe and the United Kingdom, there has been a stronger focus on 'identities' located in a social context and in interaction with groups. Whilst the difference between these approaches is increasingly blurred (and the influence of social context increasingly central) Deux does offer a distinction between the self, used in reference to an individual inner-world focus, and identities as a concept to understand the interplay between the individual within social groups (Deux, 1992). Deux's analysis would suggest that it might be more broadly consistent within social psychology to use 'identity' (rather than Ivanič's use of 'self') to depict social presentation or roles. This allows the term 'self' to be distinguished from identity; a distinction which (according to Deux) enables a loose mapping of 'identity' against the concepts of 'social identity' and 'self' against 'personal identity', which she argues should be seen as distinct but integrated facets of the whole person.

Although Deux's analysis is helpful, it would be misleading to suggest that there is any commonly accepted terminology which makes a clear distinction between identity and self. The debate is further developed by Hunt and Sampson (2006) who draw on a wide range of disciplines, including psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology and philosophy to explore the duality of the self and its relationship with reflexivity. Hunt and Sampson propose that:

A view of the self in process, then – which embraces both the notion of a felt core self arising out of the body and the linguistic self of extended consciousness – may enable us to make sense of a self that is experienced as stable and continuous but is also constantly undergoing a process of change. It can help us understand the body's role in our sense of self, as well as that of language, culture and experience. (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p. 21)

Within this quotation are some important principles about identity which I will return to throughout this thesis. Firstly the concept that the self is a process, which develops and changes both developmentally and in response to changing social and interpersonal contexts. Secondly Hunt and Sampson suggest that who we are involves both a bodily core self and a part which is social (Deux refers to this aspect as 'identity'). The core self is associated with the body as it involves human development, emotion and the unconscious whilst the social self, or identity, is associated with language through interaction with both discourse and at a societal and individual level.

Language is central to the self as it:

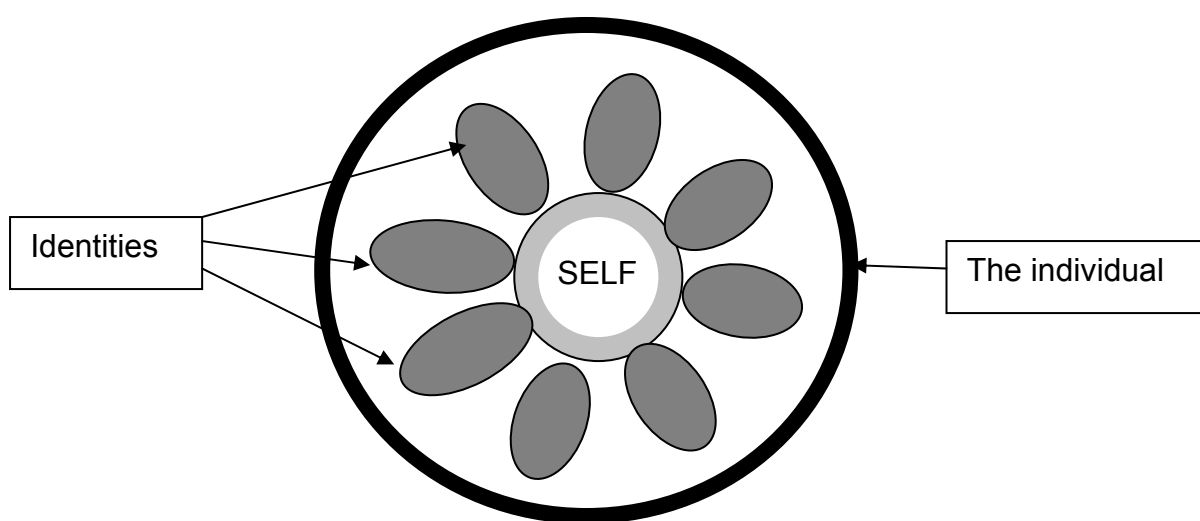
Enables us to move beyond the awareness of feelings and emotions, which is the realm of the core consciousness, to make our memories more explicit and hold them over time; it enables us to have an extended sense of self in which we observe what we are doing and feeling, so that we can reflect on past experiences and plan how we are going to deal with things in the future. (Hunt and Sampson, 2006, p. 21)

Here Hunt and Sampson suggest that it is language that forms a bridge between the core self and the outside world, but it is also through language that the core self can reflect, or in other words make use of experience in order to respond to current or future events.

In this thesis I will retain the terms identity and identities to refer to aspects of individuals' social presentation or roles, reserving the term 'self' to refer to the

inner or emotional world which represents the most consistent and authentic aspect of an individual's psychological being. The following Figure illustrates my perspective on the individual as 'containing' multiple identities. Such identities may be both contradictory, transient and over-lapping. In an inner layer lies the core self, the seat of the unconscious and emotionality, which organises and provides historical continuity.

Figure 16: The Individual, self and identities



This is not to imply, however, that the self is created or develops outside the influence of the social. Rather I concur with Frosh in his suggestion that:

Social factors are constructive...they take the raw material of each individual infant's basic psychological processes and weld and order it into the shape of a particular structure of consciousness and experience. This socially shaped structure is sometimes called simply 'I', sometimes 'the ego', most commonly 'the self'. Original emphasis (Frosh, 1991, p. 2)

This division of terminology is not intended to indicate that self and identity are separate, they are treated as inter-related, co-dependant and both socially mediated. Through chapters 5-7, I hope to illustrate the ways in which the

unconscious psychological core self influences writing alongside the more visible social identities.

3.8.3 Locating the self in writer identity

Research into writer identity, such as that of Ivanič (1996) reflects a more general trend in which the influence of social context has become increasingly important in research concerned with identity, to the point that the individual's will or emotional world is at risk of being minimised to obscurity by the forces of discourse and social construction. Layder (2004), whilst recognising the importance of discourse and social construction in shaping meaning and guiding action, suggests that:

Self-identity is suffused with feeling and emotion even if individuals attempt to suppress or to stifle their expression. Emotion is the foundation on which every aspect of human behaviour ultimately rests. All our intentions and purposes are coloured by it, especially our attempts to control and influence others. (Layder, 2004, p. 159).

This is a striking statement, particularly as Layder is a sociologist. The view he offers here shares much with the work of Henriques et al. (1998) and also Frosh (2002) who propose a theorisation of identity which draws both upon post-structuralist theories and a critical approach to psychoanalysis. In doing so, they also reaffirm the centrality of emotion and an inner world for our understanding of identity and provide an explanation for motivation, or 'desire'.

Janks (1999; 2002) provides a useful bridge between current research in the field of writer identity and psychosocial perspectives, as she is a researcher within the discipline of critical discourse analysis, who has attempted to draw

in other disciplines including psychoanalysis. Janks (2002) suggests that models of critical discourse analysis, as represented by the work of those within the tradition of Fairclough, restricts our focus to the rational:

What is missing from this model [critical discourse analysis] is the territory beyond reason. The territory of desire and identification, pleasure and play, the taboo and the transgressive; what Giroux calls 'disturbing pleasures'. (Janks, 2002, p. 9)

This recognition of the importance of motivators driven less by conscious thought and more by elements 'beyond reason' again connects with my interest in unconscious or irrational explanations of student experiences and actions. Working in the context of secondary education in South Africa, Janks uses advertisements to investigate the ways in which our responses are not limited to those of the rational, intellectual mind but are also influenced by our affective identifications that may be unconscious or irrational. Janks draws on Freud's (1916) discussion of jokes and humour to explore the conflicts between rational and irrational affective responses and why emotion associated with identification is a forceful influence. Whilst Janks found that it was not easy to predict the emotive triggers associated with particular texts, or for individual people, the power of the responses that she noted were consistently strong and potentially dangerous:

The research produced evidence that when texts or tasks touch something 'sacred' to a student, critical analysis is extremely threatening. I came to define as sacred meanings that were constitutive of students' identities, meaning that if challenged, attacked what one teacher described as 'the fibre of their belief'. (Janks, 2002, p. 22)

Although Janks is (by her own estimation) in the early stages of this work, and her focus here is not on adult student texts, she raises some fundamental

challenges to the ways in which identity and texts have been theorised which can be applied to student writing. She recognises the relevance of an irrational, emotional world which is both inextricably linked to identity and a powerful influence on individuals' relationships with texts and is equally applicable to student writing. In fact the quotation above broadens 'texts' to '*texts and tasks*' by which I would suggest that there are a range of behaviours associated with texts which are equally influenced by 'the fibre of belief' of an individual (Janks, 2002, p. 22), including thinking in preparation of texts, reading, assessing, re-reading or responding to feedback in association with a specific text. These acts encompass what I am referring to as writing practices (see 2.3). Janks restricts her analysis to a discussion of identity and identification, but does not attempt to locate emotional identification or indeed to explain the relationships between the rational and emotional self. In order to take forward her conception of a powerful, irrational aspect of identity, a clearer understanding of the self, or an individual's irrational world, is needed. In this thesis I offer some examples of the complexity of the self and the contribution that this broader conceptualisation could offer (see chapter 7).

Another bridge is provided by the work of Creme (2003) discussed in 2.5.2. in her work on using Winnicott's (1971) concept of 'play' to encourage emotional, intuitive and creative aspects of student thinking. Creme and Janks provide an important contribution, however, by placing psychoanalytic thinking on the map for those researching from an academic literacy perspective and who are focusing on writer identity in particular.

3.8.4 Psychoanalytic approaches to identity

In order to develop a model of identity in student writing which takes account of the inner-world, I have drawn upon the work of Henriques et al. (1998) and Frosh (1991; 2002). These works provide a model for understanding writer identity which takes account of psychoanalytic thinking. In their post-structuralist analysis, Henriques et al. share many essential principles with Ivanič (1998) such as recognition of subjectivity, discourse and power as cornerstones to understand not only interaction between individuals or groups but also the relationship between the individual and institutions as discussed above. This perspective is particularly important for my thesis in that it recognises the privileged nature of particular discourses, such as those dominant in the academy or discipline, as well as the influence of agency and structure. As I identified in 1.1.1, Henriques et al. provide a critical theorisation of psychoanalysis in the context of post-structuralist society, which enables them to connect multiple and changing social identities with the concept of an inner self which is relatively consistent and which is the source of motivation and affective response.

Henriques et al. (1998) provide a detailed and comprehensive review of the contribution that social psychology has made to our understanding of subjectivity. They challenge the value of framing an understanding of the subject within the individual–society dualism, referred to above in 3.8.2, in relation to Deux's (1992; 2004) analysis of social and personal identities, through a rigorous critique of developmental psychology, radical humanism, socialization, cognitive theory and social role theory, including the work of Goffman (1963; 1967; 1969). The authors suggest that not only is such

dualism unhelpful, but that in proposing multiple social selves, none of these approaches have satisfactorily addressed the question of a unifying or constant self that could combine, direct or select such disparate roles.

In representing Henriques et al.'s work I have adopted their specific use of the term 'subject', however, the authors recognise that the concept of the subject should be distinguished from the 'individual' as the individual may in fact have multiple potentially conflicting subject positions, so subject and individual are not coterminous. It is the recognition of the influence of such diverse, conflictual and historically shifting subject positions that make the conceptualisation of a unitary rational subject unsustainable. Henriques et al. draw upon a critical approach to psychoanalytic theory (in particular the work of Lacan), which they link to their perspective on subject positions based upon power-knowledge relations. Importantly, this analysis has not only provided an explanation for the emotional worlds of the individual, one of the central areas of interest for me arising from exploring reflective writing in particular (discussed in 2.5.2) but also contributed to my understanding of 'motivational dynamics' (Henriques et al., 1998, p. 205), or the ways in which individuals are positioned, or position themselves, in discourses (the possibilities for which are explored in 7.6 and 8.3.2.).

Following their broad critique, Henriques et al. propose a number of traps to be avoided in attempting to theorise identity:

Our critique indicates what traps must be avoided in an alternative approach: cognitivism, positing a unitary individual or a rational intentional being as a point of origin, reducing the social to intersubjective, and assuming that individual and society are commensurate as theoretical notions'. (Henriques, et al., 1998, p. 24)

In effect this critique suggests that there are fundamental difficulties with theories of identity arising from a wide range of approaches stemming from social psychology, which are mirrored in socially orientated research on identity in writing. These difficulties include the lack of a theory of unifying self, the presumption of human thought and behaviour being wholly conscious and rational, and the unhelpful divide between social and individual (or personal) identities. These three factors are the primary focus of my interest in questioning current perspectives on academic writing in relation to identity.

3.8.4.1 Desire and the unconscious

Through a critical analysis of psychoanalytic theory, drawing heavily upon feminist perspectives such as those of Mitchell and Rose (1982), Henriques et al. draw upon the concept of 'desire', developed by Lacan (1964) which they incorporate into their theory of 'power-knowledge relations' proposing the revised formulation of 'power-desire-knowledge'. The concept of desire provides an explanation for individuals' motivation, which does not rely upon cognitive explanations and is a core concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan suggests that desire is 'the essence of man' (Lacan, 1964, p. 275). In very simple terms desire is the motivation within us to satisfy unmet wishes or needs (although Lacan does not use the term 'need' as he associates it with only biologically driven or instinctual requirements), and such needs are experienced emotionally rather than cognitively. Lacan's concept of desire is closely associated with inter-relationships as he proposes that individuals look to others to satisfy their desires. Importantly desire is unconscious, cannot be fully articulated in speech and can never be entirely fulfilled (Evans, 1996, p. 37).

The concept of desire is used by Henriques et al., (1998) to explain the motivational core (or self), which can explain an individual's apparently irrational, unconscious and contradictory experiences and behaviour. Desire therefore is both a product of and a contributor to discourses and the nature of an individual's desires will reflect such discourses. The following quotation relates to the authors' research focusing on gender:

The content of desire, then, is neither timeless nor arbitrary, but has a historical specificity. We are suggesting that its production can be understood in terms of the emergence of particular discursive practices. Similarly, particular anxieties, phobias, depressions and so forth become comprehensible when seen in relation to practices which produce particular norms and positions for women. (Henriques et al., 1998, p. 222)

Henriques et al. therefore locate the concept of desire within *evolving* discursive relations, rather than as a fixed feature. In this context they critique the discourse relating to the satisfaction of Oedipal fantasies⁶. In doing so, the authors address some of the criticisms directed at Freudian analysis (such as his bourgeois cultural determinism, anti-feminist implications and normative

⁶ Oedipal fantasies refers to the psychoanalytic theory of the oedipal complex, a desire for sexual involvement with the parent of the opposite sex and a sense of rivalry with the parent of the same sex. This term originated from Sigmund Freud (1899) and is derived from the mythological Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother; its female analogue being the Electra complex. The Oedipal complex is considered by psychoanalysts working in the Freudian tradition to be a normal stage in the development of children ages three to five, which ends when the child identifies with the parent of the same sex and represses its sexual instincts.

position) by acknowledging selectivity and a focus upon subversive aspects of psychoanalysis which are consistent with their radical perspective, such as those proposed by Lacan (1977), discussed in 3.5.

Desire thus formulated is contradictory, unconscious and transient. This helps to explain contradictions in experiences of individuals between positions which are supported cognitively but resisted in desire. Henriques et al. (1998) provide an example of women who identify with and support feminist discourses relating to the subjugation of women through motherhood, whilst desiring not only a child but motherhood itself. A simple example in the context of student writing might be a student whose actions appear irrational or to contradict their understanding of what is expected of them within the context of institutional discourses but are in fact consistent with the student meeting her own (perhaps irrational) emotional needs. The contradictions resulting from conflicts between desire and discourses are the site for complex interactions where, Henriques et al., suggest, a Kleinian⁷ account of defence mechanisms (ways to protect ourselves from unconscious threat) can be played out. The authors suggest that these only operate interpersonally (in the communication between individuals) and also that feelings about one event may be transferred to another less threatening event. Student anxiety is a significant feature in this thesis, which makes Henriques et al.'s discussion

⁷ Kleinian refers to the influential work of (and work developed from) Melanie Klein, a twentieth century Austrian child psychoanalyst

of defence mechanisms particularly relevant, and one which I will explore in 8.3.2.2.

Henriques et al. focus on interpersonal relationships, for example between men and women, where discourses are played out. In such discourses imbalances of power are also important but they can also be paralleled with similarly unbalanced power relations between student and tutor with additional aspects of identity overlaid (such as gender, class and ethnicity). The authors suggest that their formulation of desire has a close association with power and that it takes on a more variable form in that it is no longer located within a single subject position, but will vary its location across conflicting and changing discourses. This means that one individual may be variously positioned as more or less powerful in relation to another depending upon the context and associated discourses. This creates a dissonance:

...such simultaneous positionings of power and powerlessness produce anxiety states resulting from distress at such contradiction, and the consequent desire for wholeness, unitariness. (Henriques et al. 1998, p. 225)

To summarise, Henriques et al. provide a challenging theoretical framework. Through theorising and analysis, they propose a model for understanding both the individual experience and human interaction which draws upon both post-structuralist perspectives on discourse and subjectivity and upon a critical perspective on psychoanalysis. This power-desire-knowledge perspective proposes that the individual's actions and experiences are determined by desire; desire is the root of affect and motivation, which addresses the fragmentation and dislocation implied by identifications which are not associated with a concept of the self. In doing so Henriques et al. offer

some helpful concepts to complement Ivanič's theorisation of writer identity, such as those of *projection*, *introjection* and *splitting* (1957).

These 3 notions of projection, introjection and splitting, all arising from Freudian approaches to identity development, explored Klein (Klein, et al., 2003). She proposes that early infant experiences result in individuals developing to varying degrees the ability to emotionally integrate both good and bad aspects of the self. A healthy development enables individuals to recognise and incorporate good and bad aspects of the self, and in turn to manage relationships with others that involve both positive and negative feelings. Where it is difficult to assimilate good and bad, splitting takes place, a term Klein uses to describe the process of separating good and bad aspects of the self or aspects of another person (Klein, 1957, p. 24). Klein suggests that in early life splitting is essential in order for an infant to achieve integration of good and bad in the long term. As emotionally healthy adults, however, there is an increasing ability to manage good and bad alongside each other. Introjection, closely associated with identification, is the process by which esteemed others (or aspects of them) are drawn within the individual. Projection is a process whereby (usually negative) aspects of the self are experienced as being located within someone else. Introjection and projection are both processes arising from splitting. The processes of projection and introjection are closely associated with defence mechanisms. Defence mechanisms enable us to manage emotionally difficult situations. Such defence mechanisms may not be conscious and are associated with emotional resilience (Copley et al., 1997). This concept enables us to link identity with responses to emotionally sensitive experiences. I will be drawing

upon these concepts in an attempt to understand some of the apparently irrational perspectives of participating students and the ways in which they offer their own interpretations of their interactions with tutors (see chapter 7 and 8.3.2.)

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter brings together theorisations on identity which have been influential on the development of this thesis. The foundational work of Althusser (1969) and Foucault (1972; 1979), working from an acknowledgement of power relations, provided a perspective on the ways in which subjects' identities are formed through their relationships to institutions and institutional ideologies. Althusser and Foucault shared a concern primarily for class-based inequalities, and more recent work by, amongst others, Sarup (1996) and Hall (1996; 2001) has developed a post-structuralist theorisation of identity to encompass the complexity of social identification. Hall in particular offers an important contribution to our understanding of not only identity but communicative acts. Fairclough's (1992) use of post-structuralist ideas creates a link with communicative acts and the creation of texts which have stimulated important research, such as that of Ivanič (1997), who has applied post-structuralist perspectives on identity specifically to student writing. Ivanič's work, however, has provided a framework which draws on more than just a post-structuralist perspective. Her sociological approach to identity critically applies Goffman's social role theory (Goffman, 1969) together with social constructionism to student writing through a combination of detailed textual analysis and student writer interviews.

Ivanič's work is an important landmark in researching student writing and identity, and this chapter has provided a critical summary of her work, and to which I introduce three additional layers. Firstly, I draw upon my own particular disciplinary 'insider' experience to question institutional practices in social work education and student writing. Secondly I introduce psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives on identity to draw in important debates relating to identity including the co-existence of multiplicity and salience. Thirdly, drawing on the psychoanalytically based work of Frosh (2002) and Henriques et al. (1998), I explore the nature of the 'self' (as opposed to identity or identities) and the motivational forces which underlie it. Together the psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives provide a conceptual model to explore particular aspects of student writing including motivation, the unconscious and emotionality. It is this combined theorisation that I illustrate and explore in the following chapters.

4. Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the study on which this thesis is based and discusses the ways in which it has been adopted to explore the research questions, outlined in the introduction. The sources of data are identified and an outline provided of where particular data are used within the thesis. An explanation and discussion is then provided of how the data was collected and analysed. Within my discussion of data collection I consider the challenges involved in recruiting and involving participants, in particular students, and issues around consent. One of the primary sources of data in this thesis are student interviews and I present here an extensive discussion focusing on the issues and methods involved in interviewing in the context of written texts, including a summary of the transcription methods used. In the second half of this chapter I address the analysis of data, including the use of case studies, the concept of *defended subjects*, the influence of progressive focusing and an outline of research informing my analysis of the use of first person singular pronouns.

4.2 The research questions: exploring student writing

As indicated in chapter 1, my research questions have evolved from an original set of working hypotheses, which arose from my experience as a social work and educational practitioner. My understanding of the complexity

and multi-dimensional aspects of 'student writing' also developed as I began to read the literature, developing the three core hypotheses outlined in the introduction:

1. There are significant differences in the requirements of student academic writing between courses within a single social work programme such as the one studied.
2. The specific nature of the writing task influences both the way in which students engage with academic writing and also the feedback dialogue between tutor and student.
3. The identity of student and tutor are important factors in student writing

These hypotheses were the basis of my first set of research questions (outlined in 1.3). During and after completing the first set of interviews, however, I reflected upon the original set of questions and undertook a revision to sharpen my research questions based upon my deepening understanding of the issues and familiarisation with a broader literature. The final set of questions were as follows:

In the context of a distance learning social work education programme (specifically the programme studied):

1. What differences exist in the requirements and expectations of different kinds of assessed texts written by students, such as reflective writing and the form of applied social science essay?

2. How does the specific nature of the writing task influence students' and tutors' engagement with academic writing?
3. How does student identity influence the experience and practice of different kinds of student writing?

These questions underpinned my second set of interviews and drove my analysis of not only the interviews but of related data sources discussed in this chapter. There is further discussion of how my research questions evolved and informed my interviewing in 4.11.

4.3 Gaining access to students

The primary source of data for this research has been interviews with students about their texts. The first challenge posed in setting up my research was therefore to gain access to students.

4.3.1 Engaging student involvement

This study has relied upon students being willing to participate in interviews in which they shared and discussed assessed texts with me. I was aware that this demanded a high level of trust in me as a researcher. I was also aware that for any student who had any anxiety or lacked confidence in their writing, the thought of discussing shared texts could be uncomfortable and threatening. Elbow (1998) explores the anxieties raised for inexperienced writers in sharing their words on paper, even in the context of reading aloud to a friend. Sharing our writing with others in the context of assessment, feedback or judgement can be even more intimidating. The difference in roles between the potential participants and me may have acted as an additional

inhibitor. Although I presented myself as a 'research student', I was not only a lecturer and qualified social worker but also a 'familiar name' to many students as a member of academic staff. All the students who eventually participated in the study, as employment-based students, worked for one local authority social services department with whom I had worked closely, both tutoring previous student cohorts and undertaking a pilot study. I was therefore 'known' by reputation or personal contact to many of the students, the training officer and local university staff. This prior contact was important in building up a degree of trust and understanding of the relevance of this research which facilitated obtaining permission.

4.3.2 Consent

In social work, consent to draw upon the work of social services, even indirectly, can be problematic due to the sensitivity of third party information and the expectations of confidentiality relating to service users. Consent was therefore required from the students themselves, the local authority who employed them, the University's student ethics committee and also the University's Social Work Department. Permission was also obtained from the tutors⁸ of the participating students. Consent was dependant upon agreements to anonymise not only students' identities but also the service

⁸ Although the participating students shared one practice learning tutor, they belonged to one of four foundation course tutor groups. This meant that as marked texts were used from both of these courses, permission was needed from 5 tutors in all.

users who appeared both in students' texts and in interviews. Mention of specific service users was particularly relevant in the practice learning course where students were required to discuss examples of their work with service users during practice learning placements. I was not able to consult or seek permission from service users featuring in students' writing, so absolute anonymity was essential. Written permission from students was therefore sought for the use of texts and also for participation in the interviews. Permission for audio recording the interviews was sought at the beginning of each interview.

4.3.3 The group studied

As outlined in 1.8, I based my study on a single tutorial group of social work students. The group selected were all employed in a multi-cultural conurbation of the West Midlands. The membership of this group was diverse in its representation of gender, cultural and educational background and ethnicity, discussed in more detail in 1.8. These students were studying on a national programme with over a thousand students who are widely geographically dispersed. This meant that it would not have been possible to speak with all students in a face-to-face meeting and I was not confident that other options for contact (such as electronic communication or requests made in paper communication sent to all students) would effectively engage participants. It was for this reason that one specific tutor group was targeted, and face-to-face contact was made with this group only.

I made initial contact with students via their practice learning course tutor, to whom I gave a written outline of the project which he discussed with the

group, providing photo-copies for students to take home (Appendix 1). This letter foregrounded language diversity, as I had initially hoped to explore this aspect of identity and experience on student writing. This initial contact was followed up with a face-to-face visit to the whole tutor group (all but one student was present) at which I was able to talk to students directly about the research and answer their questions. The project was presented to all potential participants as being about their own writing and identity, in particular their experiences of writing both in the past and on the current courses of study. At this meeting all fifteen students were given a consent form; all agreed to their texts being used and eight agreed to participate in interviews.

4.4 The process of data collection

The main period of data collection took place from January 2001 to December 2001, a period which coincided with one full year's study for students on the Diploma in Social Work programme. Course materials and associated guides were obtained directly from the University just prior to the beginning of the year of study. An additional period of data collection took place in September 2002, when I recorded a telephone discussion with a group of three experienced practice learning tutors, which from hereon I refer to as the 'tutor discussion'.

4.4.1 Summary of data collected

The data which I have used for this thesis, in summary, focuses on:

1. The course materials and associated written guidance

2. The tutors
3. The students

The data include:

The course materials and associated written guidance

- Full course materials from the foundation course and practice learning course. This included written and audio recorded learning materials representing a total of 900 hours of study in addition to guidance aimed at students and tutors
- All study advice (online and paper) available to this cohort of students.

The tutors

- Audio recording and full transcript of a telephone discussion with 3 experienced practice learning course tutors, based upon an anonymised marking exercise using two practice learning course student texts (duration of approx 1hr 30 minutes).

The students

- Interviews and selective transcription and notes from interviews with 8 students, a total of 15 interviews of approx 1 hour each.
- Student texts from two courses, two each from the 10 students studying the foundation course and one each from the 15 students studying the practice learning course, a total of 35 student texts.

4.4.2 Interviews with students

Student interviews based around specific texts formed the most substantial form of data used in this study. From the 15 students participating, 8 were interviewed; the remaining students only gave permission to use their texts. Two interviews were undertaken with the 8 participants. In total over fifteen hours of interview data were collected. The following table illustrates those students who were interviewed and which texts they contributed:

Figure 17: Student interviews

| Student | Interviewed | Data collected |
|---------|-------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | No | All texts |
| 2 | No | Practice-learning course text only |
| 3 | Yes | All texts |
| 4 | Yes | All texts |
| 5 | No | Practice-learning course text only |
| 6 | No | All texts |
| 7 | No | Practice-learning course text only |
| 8 | Yes | All texts |
| 9 | Yes | All texts |
| 10 | No | All texts |
| 11 | Yes | All texts |
| 12 | No | Practice-learning course text only |
| 13 | Yes | All texts |
| 14 | Yes | All texts |
| 15 | No | Non participant |
| 16 | Yes | Practice-learning course text |

Contact was maintained between these interview sessions by phone or email.

I conducted all of the interviews myself in a location of the student's choice, which included their own home and place of work. The first interview took

place within the first third of the academic year, the second following approximately 10 weeks later. Both interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.

The 8 students interviewed were sent planned outlines of the three interviews (Appendix 2). The aim of the first meeting was to explore students' language and educational histories and to set up a relationship through which students felt able to reflect on their experiences of writing. Participants were asked to think about their writing of the most recent essay prior to the meeting. The majority of students were prepared and very keen to start talking about their texts and current writing tasks. One example of this was Patricia (student 13), who within the first third of the first interview introduced her anxiety about putting pen to paper on her current courses of study and also her frustration with her practice learning tutor's feedback that she should be 'more personal' in her assignment. It is possible that, having asked participants to be prepared to discuss their texts, this was their primary expectation despite also being told that we would talk about their language and educational experiences.

The second and third interviews did not in fact take place as planned; I revised my methodology after the first interview in order to reduce the number of interviews from 3 down to 2. I took this decision in response to the length and detailed nature of the first interview and students' concern about the amount of time that they could spare. Consequently I decided to conflate interviews 2 and 3, which also had the advantage of enabling me to adopt a comparative approach to the practice learning and the foundation courses rather than discussing each course separately. The original set of interview

questions was sent to students with a covering letter, which encouraged participants to think about the focus of each interview in advance so that they could introduce issues to the discussion which concerned them. This was an attempt to include the students in the construction of knowledge by enabling them to have forewarning of the topics that I was interested in as well as providing them with an opportunity to think in advance about issues that they wanted to raise. Based upon my experience of the first interviews, I amended the style of questions (Appendix 3) to encourage students to think about experiences that they may wish to share associated with 'issues' rather than answers to questions. I hoped that this approach would result in greater interviewee participation. As indicated in chapter 1 and discussed further below in 4.7, my intention was to facilitate interviewer participation in the interviews, however this was limited by several issues in relation to the design of the methodology, the way in which the interviews were conducted and the data analysed. This will be discussed further in 4.9.

The revised second interview questions (Appendix 4) reflected a re-focusing of the research questions, in part based upon my experience of undertaking the first set of interviews. I wanted to present the questions in an open way so as to encourage students to introduce their own ideas and issues, but I also wanted to introduce a comparative discussion of the writing on the two courses studied and retain a clear focus on the research questions. The second interviews, therefore, aimed to explore:

1. Students' comparative perspective on the practice learning and the foundation courses, including their understanding of the written guidance provided.
2. Discussion of the experience of tutor feedback.
3. More specific exploration of reflective writing including the use of self-disclosure and also authoritative sources.

My intention was that the student and I could draw upon the shared experience and knowledge which had been built up from the first interview which I hoped would provide a space for exploration of issues initiated by either party. By this point in the course students were in a position to reflect on the experience of writing for both courses.

4.4.3 Transcription and note making of interviews

I recorded all interviews on audio-cassette, with the permission of participants. I then played back and listened to each recording as soon after the interview as possible and took brief notes outlining any themes arising from the interviews. I listed these themes (see Appendix 5) and then tabulated each of them across all of the participants to make any common themes more visible. One illustration is provided on the theme of emotion (see Appendix 6). The analysis of this data is discussed further in 4.8 below. My transcription and note taking involved drawing up four data columns (see Appendix 10). The first summarised the main points of discussion, the second contained small sections of word-for-word transcription and the third noted links between transcribed discussion and a particular section of student text. The final

column was a space for my own comment or reflection, for example making notes of connections with themes or issues of interest. This was particularly important while my final research questions crystallised and I began analysis of the interview data. Returning to the audio-recordings enabled me to transcribe and note take in more detail those sections as I became aware of their significance to the themes or research questions. Columns noting the counter point on the recording preceded the first and second data columns, enabling me to rewind and review specific sections of the interview.

In the detailed sections of transcription (column two) I followed some transcription conventions, shown in the following key:

KEY

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| P: | Initial of person speaking |
| [laughs] | Transcriber's additional observations |
| ... | Break in flow of conversation |
| Bold | Indicates link to a student text |

In addition to these broad conventions I also added some punctuation, based upon my comprehension of the interviewees' speech to assist the reader.

These conventions and punctuation were used to give a slightly fuller picture of the dialogue and to make overt any sections of text where the meaning had been influenced by non-verbal communication, such as pauses, laughter or the demonstration of emotion through body language. This kind of non-verbal communication is difficult to capture with an audio-recording and written transcription, so appears sometimes within the transcription, such as '[laughter]', and sometimes in my commentary notes.

4.4.4 Talk with students in the context of texts

Whilst the interviews were semi-structured and allowed for participants to contribute to the direction of discussion, they also took place in the context of specific texts. This method of text-based interviewing, influenced by the research of Ivanič (1997) and Lillis (2001), enabled both interviews to focus upon the texts (and feedback comments) produced by the participant but about which I, as interviewer, also had knowledge. As a result, texts provided a common reference point around which discussion took place. Making direct reference to texts (by both the participant and me) as suggested by Ivanič, provided rich data.

However interesting and complex the writing process may appear in theory, the observations of writers themselves are even more interesting and reveal even greater complexity. (Ivanic, 1997, p. 115)

Participants used the texts, particularly the tutor feedback written comments, to support and illustrate their discussion, and occasionally read out tutor comments aloud. For example, 'Patricia', who felt frustration at the discrepancy between her tutor's comments and his grade, stated as follows:

I mean the comments that [practice learning course tutor] has made in this, I mean he has made some lovely comments and I was really quite encouraged but I felt that his comments were so good yet the mark was 67% and I felt disappointed with that you know. I felt that the mark didn't really reflect the comments [laughter]. I mean in his comments he talks about you know that I had [reading] 'worked hard to produce an essay that is honest reflective thought provoking, flows well, follows the structure, well laid out, cases are very powerful' and in the end 'all in all a very powerful read Patricia well done- 67% [laughs]

P1: Patricia interview: 14th June 2001

This list of positive comments on Patricia's text feedback (*honest, reflective, thought provoking, flows well, follows the structure, well laid out, cases are*

very powerful) appeared to Patricia to contradict the grade received, which she considered mediocre. Patricia's direct reading from her text provided a shared focus for both of us, as interviewer and interviewee, through which she could provide an insight into her interpretation of the tutor's practices.

Patricia's interpretation of her tutor's comments provide genuine data evidencing her experience, but the existence of the text itself also opens up the possibility of analysing possible alternative interpretations of the tutor practices. These possibilities were explored through the tutor discussion discussed in 4.4.7. Text based interviews enabled me to explore both student writing and tutor comments with students in the interviews. Lillis (2001, p. 6) refers to 'talk around texts' to illustrate the importance of exploring texts within their wider context, or 'real-world settings', positioning her as a:

Participant-observer of their [the students'] experience of engaging in academic writing alongside the collection and analysis of numerous kinds of texts related to their writing (course guidance on essay writing, departmental feedback and advice sheets, tutors written comments) ...the emphasis is on exploring literacy in real-world settings (Lillis, 2001, p. 6)

Here Lillis illustrates the significance of not only exploring texts through talk with students, but also of drawing in tutor comments, course guidance and wider departmental guidance, all of which have an impact on the individual students' writing. Therefore, the student texts, along with the course texts and tutor feedback all contribute to creating a context through which I could explore the experience of participating in academic writing tasks with the student. Some of the data sources were common to all students (such as the course related guidance) but the students' texts, relationships with individual tutors and experiences of engaging writing were unique. The resulting

research lens provides a kaleidoscope in which a small part of the picture may remain static whilst other parts change, the overall picture transforming very slightly with each turn. Such turns of this kaleidoscopic lens are important in order to capture the unique experiences of individuals whilst also broader common themes remain more constant.

4.4.5 Student texts

A total of 35 texts were collected and analysed from the two courses in the study, the practice learning course and the foundation course. Students completed permission slips which enabled texts to be copied and released centrally from the University. This enabled the student and me to have access to the marked texts prior to each interview. Once written permission had been obtained from students, marked texts were accessed directly from the University's assignment handling office, where they were copied prior to being returned to students. Only one assignment (of three) was released from the practice learning course as the second assignment requested was an examined assignment and could not therefore be released. Both of the requested texts from the foundation course were released (from a total of 7). All of the texts had been marked and contained extensive tutor comments as well as a summative grade. Texts were received from 15 out of 16 students.

Figure 18: Texts collected

| Student | Foundation course texts | Practice learning course texts |
|----------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 2 | 0 | 1 |
| 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 5 | 0 | 1 |
| 6 | 2 | 1 |
| 7 | 0 | 1 |
| 8 | 2 | 1 |
| 9 | 2 | 1 |
| 10 | 0 | 1 |
| 11 | 2 | 1 |
| 12 | 0 | 1 |
| 13 | 2 | 1 |
| 14 | 2 | 1 |
| 15 | Non participant | |
| 16 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 20 | 15 |

NB: The students are referred to here by number as pseudonyms have only been used for those students who form case studies for this thesis. Those students on whom case study material is presented have been highlighted, and can be identified as follows:

4 = Pamela
8 = David
13 = Patricia
16 = Bernie

In addition to the texts themselves, data has included the feedback and comments on students' work written by tutors. All of the students shared the

same tutor for the practice learning course but not for the foundation course. Differences in their experiences of feedback both across the courses and between tutors have provided insight into the process of participating in assessed writing. A simple tabulation was used to compile summary comments on texts for both courses for those students who were interviewed (Appendix 7).

4.4.6 Course materials

Teaching on the programme studied was delivered through a combination of face-to-face tutorials and workshops, practice learning in the workplace and multi-media distance learning materials, referred to here as the course materials. Students involved in this study were participating in the first level of the Diploma in Social Work and consequently following two courses, the practice learning course and the foundation course. The curriculum components for each course were as follows:

Figure 19: Summary of course materials

| | Foundation course | Practice learning course |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Written learning materials | 7 Blocks of study (approx 1330 pages in total) | 1 Block of study, a practice learning guide workshop guide and Aids to Practice cards (Approx 370 pages) |
| Audio learning materials | Approx 3 hours | 2 hours |
| Video learning materials | Approx 2 hours | None |
| Set books | Two (The Good Study Guide and <i>Understanding Health and Social Care: an Introductory Reader</i>) | None |

| | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Tutorials / workshops | 20 hours total | 28 hours total |
| Practice learning | None | 60 days |
| Total hours of study | 600 hours | 600 hours |

The main focus of data analysis was on the supplementary guidance provided to students and tutors for the completion and assessment of written work and detailed as in Figure 20:

Figure 20: Course guides

| Text | Pages | Course |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| Assignment Book | 27 pages | Practice learning course |
| Programme Guide | 60 pages | Practice learning course |
| Tutor Guide | 76 pages | Practice learning course |
| Tutor Guide | 68 pages | Foundation course |
| Introduction and study guide | 22 pages | Foundation course |
| Assignment Book | 32 pages | Foundation course |

While all of the data collected informed the analysis, the thesis developed here is constructed around these four case studies. The use of case studies is discussed further in 4.11.2.

4.4.7 Telephone interviewing

As part of the process of progressive focusing (see 4.11.1), early examination of the data from students, their texts and the course materials in relation to the research questions indicated that the tutor perspective was an essential one.

This was because students were consistently referring to the comments made on their texts and questioning tutors' interpretation of both their writing and the course guidance. Written comments on student texts alone would not provide sufficient insight into tutors' perspectives and expectations of student writing nor the implicit conventions associated with student writing on the practice learning course in particular. I had intended to recruit the course tutors of the students studied, which would have enabled me to explore specific interpersonal issues raised by students relating to identity, but this unfortunately proved impossible for the individual tutors concerned. Therefore, as an alternative I invited three tutors, experienced in teaching, assessing and moderating the practice learning course, to participate in an anonymous marking exercise and discussion, which was audio recorded and was transcribed. This aspect of data collection was funded by the practice learning course and had the dual function that the data would be made available for the purpose of evaluating the assessment strategy on the course. Consequently payment was available to tutors to encourage participation, and a letter sent out to participants outlining the task (Appendix 8). The marking exercise was based upon two anonymised practice-learning course texts drawn from the main sample. The texts were retyped and clean (they did not have any comments or grades attached to them). Each tutor marked and commented on both texts and returned copies to me prior to the conference to minimise the degree of peer group influence. The tutor discussion was set up, as far as possible, to mimic the methodology of the individual student interviews. A loosely structured set of questions was prepared to guide the discussion and the tutors (see Appendix 9), as had the students, shared the

common experience of engaging with the same text, albeit from the perspective of assessor and teacher rather than student writer. Beyond this the tutors brought diverse experiences and their own beliefs, identities and perspectives to the interview and the method of questioning, as with the students, encouraged interviewees to participate in developing understanding with the interviewer by contributing their ideas within the limitations of the interview structure. The main difference in the tutor discussion, however, was that there was the possibility of group interaction and discussion.

4.4.8 Study advice

Students participating in this study had access to a range of study advice, including specific reference to writing, some of which was course specific and some of which was generic. The most extensive source of guidance was from within the foundation course and consisted of integrated study notes and exercises throughout the course. A set study skills book supported these study notes. In addition students could access paper and online 'toolkits', each focusing on a different aspect of study skills, such as 'Essay and report writing skills', 'Reading and note taking' and 'Effective use of English'. The 'Effective use of English' toolkit was adapted as an online website specifically for students studying the foundation course.

4.5 Where the data has been used

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 contain discussion of the data gathered focusing on three broad areas; each chapter relies on slightly different combinations of data sources. Chapter 5 is concerned with the purpose and guidance given on

each of the two written tasks undertaken by students on the practice learning course and the foundation course. The data used are the written guidance provided on each course to students and tutors, university-wide writing support resources, such as online toolkits, student interviews and texts and the tutor discussion. Chapter 6 explores the ways in which reflection and identity are drawn upon in each of the courses and draws upon the text orientated student interviews and the texts themselves, including tutor text comments. The Chapter 7 focuses on the ways in which identity impacts on students' writing experiences; it draws primarily upon the text orientated student interviews, with some use of tutor text comments. In relation to the research questions, the data has been used in the following way:

Figure 21: Tabulation of data against the research questions

| What are the requirements and expectations of different kinds of student writing? | How do prior experiences (personal and educational) impact on the experience and practice of student writing? | How do student and tutor identities influence different kinds of student writing? |
|--|--|--|
| Chapters 5 and 6 | Chapters 6 and 7 | Chapter 6 and 7 |
| Course guidance | Student interviews | Student interviews |
| Tutor telephone discussion | Student texts | Student texts |
| Student interviews | Tutor text comments | Tutor comments |
| Student texts | | Tutor telephone discussion |
| Tutor comments | | |

4.6 A psychologically informed approach to interviewing

The research interview, a central focus for enquiry in this study, needs to reflect the epistemological and broader methodological frame of my study. The particular theoretical perspectives that I have found helpful in exploring individual experiences in interviewing derive broadly from psychology and psychoanalysis and are explored in some depth here.

4.6.1 Epistemological perspective

It has been suggested, for example by Kvale (1996), that there are three levels of theorisation required when undertaking research: ontological, epistemological and methodological and that these three levels are connected. My ontological starting point, influenced by feminist researchers such as Reinharz (1992), Scott (1985) and Lather (1991), involves the recognition of social diversity, unequal power relations and the importance of knowledge as social construction and subject relations. This world view leads on to an epistemological position which legitimates a post structuralist approach to knowledge creation rather than drawing upon a positivist suggestion of the existence of common eternal truths. The acceptance of such truths in the context of researching human experiences inevitably relies upon the existence of a degree of consensus, even if only amongst groupings, sections or subdivisions of society. My intention throughout the design, data collection and analysis has been to move away from positivist methodologies. The concept of 'Discourse', for example, as a concept and research

paradigm, has been relevant from a tradition of discourse analysis which recognises the inevitability of partiality. Taylor (2001) suggests that;

... the complexity and also the dynamic nature of the social world means that a researcher can seldom make confident predictions about it...no single neutral truth is possible in the social sciences because these involve the study of other people who have their own viewpoints...there are multiple realities and therefore multiple truths. (Taylor in Wetherell et al., 2001, p. 14)

This quotation illustrates how the diversity of participants' identities and experiences are as important as any commonalities and as such are explicit foci of study.

Taking diversity of individual experiences as a starting point to explore human experiences, however leads the researcher into the area of phenomenology, placing an emphasis upon the importance of realities as experienced or perceived by individuals. This does not deny the relevance of commonalities of perception or experience, but opens the research paradigm up to validate the experiences of the individual as a contributor to knowledge creation (Kvale, 1996). I have found that this concern with the experiences of individuals has accorded with psychological approaches to interviewing and led me to a number of key principles which have guided my interviewing.

4.6.2 Principles of interviewing

My five principles of interviewing evolved from applying participative approaches to research and transferring selected techniques used in social work practice and therapy to a research context. In brief these five principles are:

- Participant involvement
- Recognising that explicit identities result in situated, partial data
- Responding to unique experiences in the context of texts
- Recognising power dynamics
- Recognising emotion
- Empathic interviewing

In undertaking interviews my aim was to maximise the involvement of participants in the creation of knowledge. Although in practice my interviewing did not enable genuine co-construction of knowledge, my interview design enabled participants to provide a lead on some issues discussed. The relevance of identities was central, both in relation to participants and myself. As such my interviews represented partial and situated data, a feature which is both recognised and utilised in my analysis. The acknowledgement of difference in relation to identities enabled me also to consider the impact of sameness and otherness on the interviewing relationship and the potential for power imbalances created as a result. From the perspective of therapeutic interviewing, I drew on the importance of recognising emotion as an important factor guiding my questioning. This perspective also provided clear guiding principles relating to empathic interviewing such as building trust and methods of deepening understanding such as re-phrasing and offering insight.

4.7 Participant involvement in data production through interviewing

4.7.1 Recognising that explicit identities result in situated, partial data

The methodology of this thesis has been underpinned by the assumption that I have attempted to involve participants in my exploration of their experiences. This participative approach draws upon Kvale's 'traveller metaphor' (Kvale, 1996), the researcher 'wandering together with' participants in search of insight and understanding. This image illustrates the 'inter-relational and structural' (Kvale 1996) nature of knowledge which this approach exploits. As such my epistemological claims are based upon the belief that partial and situated construction of knowledge is not only valid and relevant, but also inevitable in the context of this thesis as elsewhere. Reinharz (1992) uses the term 'experiential analysis' to refer to an approach which she identified as common in feminist research, whereby the researcher embraces their own subjectivity and draws upon personal experience throughout the research process. The concept of co-construction of understanding derives from well established feminist critiques of research methods and is illustrated by the following quotation:

The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives. (Reinharz, 1992, p. 32)

4.7.2 Responding to unique experiences in the context of texts

All of the interviews used the individual students' texts, together with a common knowledge of the course materials, as a reference point. The specific experiences of each student in relation to these documents, however, are unique and unpredictable as they draw upon the identities and lives of each participant. Reinharz (1992) cites the approach of Harrington and Aisenberg who in their research used semi-structured interviewee-led interviews, in which:

Because we did not know at the outset what the particulars of each woman's relevant experience would be, we did not conduct the interviews through preset questions. Rather, we identified general areas we wanted to cover, but let the interviewees responses determine the order of subjects, the time spent on each, and the introduction of additional issues. (Reinharz, 1992, p. 38)

Although my interviews were not interviewee-led to this extent, I attempted to devise sufficiently general questions (particularly in the revised second interview) to enable space for unpredictable issues to be raised which arose from the students' individual conscious and unconscious experiences. Some of these issues, such as the use of the first person singular pronouns became significant themes.

4.7.3 Recognising power dynamics

The involvement of participants in influencing the direction of questioning enabled me to address in some part the inherent power differential between the interviewees and myself as the researcher, by facilitating and valuing both the introduction of topics and interpretation of the issues by the participant.

One significant example of this is the different usage of first person singular pronouns on the foundation course and the practice learning course. Neither the original interview questions used for interview one nor the revised second interview questions specifically raised the issue of first person pronoun use. Despite this, the issue was raised by all of the students presented here as case studies. David, for example, alludes to the use of the first person as a key difference between the foundation and practice learning course:

David: Well, in [the foundation course] you would be unlikely to use the first person. I think that is basically it. The requirement to put the 'I' centre stage in [the foundation course].

D1: David interview: 17th April 2001

Patricia raises the same issue, slightly less directly, in expressing concern about the lack of preparation for writing on the practice learning course:

Patricia: What we should have had Lucy to start with was some sort of workshop giving us an idea of the style, it's the style that is so different because [practice learning course tutor] wants 'I want, I think, I feel I felt' where as the [foundation course] is looking at writing in the third person.

P2: Patricia interview: 14th June 2001

These two examples illustrate the way in which an issue raised by interviewees in response to very general questions about their experiences of writing on the two courses led to a significant research theme relevant to the research questions. This particular issue is explored in some detail in 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5, where I explore the explicit and implicit expectations of student writing across the two courses.

Involving interviewees' issues like this is also a way in which I can value the participants' expertise gained through experience in a particular discipline.

The participants not only contribute to the creation of understanding, but through the process of interviewing may gain insight themselves:

A well carried out research interview can be a rare and enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into his or her life situation. (Kvale, 1996, p. 158)

Without follow up research it is not possible for me to fully understand the degree to which the interviews resulted in greater insight for participants. However, the process of being involved in the research and reflecting upon their writing generally resulted in thoughtful and reflective interview data from students. Some interviewees demonstrated more immediate insights during the interviews, such as Pamela:

Pamela: I find if I don't give myself too much time for my writing I'm OK
Lucy: So you'd write straight onto the computer and then would you go back and check it?
Pamela: I'd print it off, read it and then if I found any I'd mark any mistakes I'll go through it on the computer and then print it off.
Lucy: And what would happen if you did give yourself more time, because you implied that that would make you more worried?
Pamela: I think it would, I really think it would. If I've more chance to think about it I've got more time to worry about it. With the first [the foundation course] I really, really mulled over it for about two weeks I thought I really can't do this, they are wanting too much from me!

PM1: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

In this extract Pamela reflects on her own writing practice of not allowing herself too much time to redraft her writing. She seems to realise that if she did so it would focus her anxiety about her ability to write and that writing quickly may in fact be one of her strategies for managing her own anxiety.

The interviews with both students and tutors provided a valuable opportunity for deepening my own reflections on student writing. Having been a social

work student myself I was able to empathise with many of the experiences shared with me, such as the frustration of trying to 'second guess' what an individual tutor would value in a piece of assessed writing. The interviews also made me more aware of my own identities and the emotions generated in me as an educator and learner. I shared with many of the participants the experience of being a mother responsible for a family whilst studying and also the history of overcoming negative learning experiences at school which at times influenced my experiences of current learning. Moments of resonance such as these provided invaluable opportunities for reflection on my data and also as a starting point for analysis.

4.7.4 Participant: Researcher Positioning

My identity as researcher is also significant in my positioning in relation to participant interviewees. Both interviewer and interviewee take part in each encounter through the foregrounding or backgrounding of particular aspects of their identity. Finch (1984) talks of the researcher 'placing' themselves in relation to their interviewees. In placing myself as an academic, researcher and educator, I created difference and a potential power imbalance. The research role creates an imbalance of power which is at risk of being accentuated when the researcher is not a member of the oppressed groups to whom she is reaching out.

Not only does the researcher set the agenda but she also decides whose voice can be heard. (Crozier, 2003, p. 82)

Crozier suggests that there is a need to counter the trap of researchers reinforcing a 'them and us' dichotomy through acknowledging the

marginalisation of respondents from oppressed groups as 'Other' but then speaking on their behalf. One response to the risk of such marginalization is symmetrical matching of researcher and respondent identities. This approach, critiqued by Mirza (2000), is problematic due to multiple identities and experiences of both parties, although commonality of experiences or understanding can provide a starting point for building trust (Crozier, 2003).

Such commonalities can be nurtured through openness on the part of the researcher, enabling her to identify herself with experiences, which build rather than inhibit connections. For example I shared with student participants not only evident aspects of my identity such as my gender, but also my background as a social worker (thereby sharing professional identity) and family circumstances as a mother who was both working and studying (sharing with several participants these three competing roles). Thus the potential barrier of being a representative of the University or academic community may be partially mitigated by identification based upon gender, motherhood, and being a student or genuine expressions of empathy. The very process of sharing personal experiences or aspects of identity signals vulnerability in the researcher which can assist in breaking down the power differential and assist in building a non-exploitative relationship.

4.8 The place of emotion

Sinding and Aronson (2003) in their research on death and palliative care raise important considerations for researchers involved in interviewing participants where questioning may exacerbate emotional vulnerability:

Particularly in later interviews, with greater rapport established, some participants expressed strong feelings about their situations: humiliation, fear, shame, depression and anger. While this was 'good data' I was sometimes troubled that I had elicited difficult and seldom acknowledged or shared feelings and stories and left just the rawness behind. (Sinding and Aronson, 2003, p. 101)

Discussion with some students in this study also touched upon areas which were highly emotive such as their experiences of racism both as children and adults. All students however exposed a degree of vulnerability through engaging in talk about their writing, which required careful questioning in order to elicit relevant data but avoid aggravating anxieties. This was particularly important as students were in the process of studying. Where vulnerabilities were discussed in interviews, therefore, it was important that I also focused on the students' strengths and strategies so that they did not leave feeling disempowered in their writing. In my interview with Christine, who spoke of her lack of confidence in her ability to write, it was important to remind Christine of her strengths:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| <i>Christine:</i> | <i>When I was in Jamaica I used to come first and second in everything</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmm</i> |
| <i>Christine:</i> | <i>You know – that- I did in school but when I came here I sort of - back in the 6th and the 7th and the 8th and the 10th – you know that's how I slipped!</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmm – It's still quite good though. It is still in the top half of the class</i> |
| <i>Christine:</i> | <i>Yeah but when you are a perfectionist you want to keep those firsts and seconds</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Yes</i> |

Christine interview: 12th March 2001

Christine's comparison of her successful educational performance in Jamaica with that in England seemed to imply failure in her emphatic '*you know that's*

how I slipped'. My response was intended to remind Christine that despite her 'slipping' in the class ranking, she was still a successful student, (*'It's still quite good though. It is still in the top half of the class'*) and the comment resulted in her acknowledging her own perfectionism.

Sinding and Aronson (2003) caution against the interviewer reinforcing dominant discourses which can reaffirm the interviewee's negative self-perception. Such reinforcing can result unintentionally from unguarded lines of questioning or responses. During interviews I was aware of a pull towards reaffirming students' (and tutors') belief that writing is a straightforward skill and consequently discussing it in terms of sentence-level grammar. For example my interview with Pamela initially led me to join with her in focusing on why she had problems with her writing, if she had always found writing difficult and whether either of the courses were more or less difficult. It was not until we talked together about the process of how she typed her essays and her interpretation of the feedback, which remained a mystery to her, that it became clear that the problem lay with the inconsistency of both the conventions and the tutors' application of conventions across the two courses. The feedback from the tutor and my own initial responses indicate a focus upon Pamela's technical writing skills (her use of surface-level grammar and punctuation) and how she has dealt with these. Stepping back however it was clear that criticism of her writing, which confirmed her own lack of confidence in her ability, derived from Pamela misunderstanding a technicality relating to the use of the computer together with ineffective communication between the student and tutor to resolve the problem.

There is a delicate balance, therefore to be struck here between challenging the homeostasis of students' conceptions of themselves and upturning their world by introducing alternative explanations and discourses:

Insofar as research interviews can be understood to 'expose failures' an 'unsettle accommodations', they can be seen to threatened study participants' identities. (Sinding and Aronson, 2003, p. 102)

As a researcher I have a responsibility for retaining an awareness of the potential effects of such threatened identities, so I made efforts to avoid offering to students my own initial or immediate responses to what I thought lay behind their writing experiences, particularly where this might bolster negative identity. Where possible I allowed the student to lead with their own analysis or interpretations of their experiences, although I was also aware in my analysis that this student-led approach did not necessarily offer a transparent window onto their experiences.

4.9 Empathic intuitive interviewing

As indicated in the preceding discussion, my identity and relationship with the participants is explicit and treated as contributory to both the process of data collection and the analysis. My relevant experiences and skills also explicitly influenced both the process of data collection (particularly the interviewing) and also the analysis. Of particular significance, I believe, have been my communication and interpersonal skills developed over my career as a professional social worker. Throughout my interviews I aspired to follow Anderson's suggestion that::

Compassionate listening allows our research participants to speak to us freely and honestly about the depth and value of their human experiences...compassion allows us to see the values and significance of the data as they shape themselves before us. (Anderson, 1998, p. 4)

Kvale (1996) recognises the relevance of interpersonal skills, amongst others, of the research interviewer;

The outcome of an interview depends on the knowledge, sensitivity, and empathy of the interviewer. (Kvale, 1996, p. 105)

I was aware, however, that caution was needed in the use of my insider disciplinary perspective as it had the potential to inhibit me in retaining a critical distance.

Rogers suggests in his theory of 'client-centred interviewing' (Rogers, 1962) that empathy can be created through interviewer responses which offer accurate interpretations with 'warmth', 'positive regard' and mirroring.

Psychoanalytic traditions, as represented by the work of Rogers, provide a framework for research interviewing which recognises and values the interpersonal, emotive and intuitive nature of the process. As stated by Kvale (1996);

It is difficult to draw any strong line of demarcation between a therapeutic and a research interview. Both may lead to increased understanding and change, but with the emphasis on personal change in a therapeutic interview and on intellectual understanding in a research interview. (Kvale, 1996, p. 155).

The interviews in this thesis have drawn upon Rogerian techniques, including empathy and reframing both to facilitate a positive experience for the participants and also to deepen understanding. Participants' reticence in disclosing personal information could arise from a need for greater trust. My

attempts to use intuitive reframing and empathy opened up the possibility for me to deepen my understanding of participants' experiences. The following extract is one example of such deepening of understanding from the first interview with Bernie. In the following extract, you can see how I take the opportunity to value her achievements and skills and focus on her feeling that they were undervalued by others:

- Bernie: I thought other people talked and treated others the same way, which was not so, it's not so at all. I was a unique person out there. And because people keep pointing that out to me, the more I realise that I need to do something about it, 'cos there's nothing else for me*
- Lucy: So people pointing out that you had particular skills in communicating?*
- Bernie: Yeah*
- Lucy: So you felt that you wanted to do more?*
- Bernie: Yeah, it was right that I felt like somebody needed to know that this was not fair, the fact that I didn't have a piece of paper wasn't fair, so I wanted to...*
- Lucy: So you felt that people were not valuing you and your skills?*
- Bernie: Because I didn't have the paper behind me*
- Lucy: Didn't have the respect because you didn't have the qualification?*
- Bernie: Yeah or I had a lot of people referring, even the schools saying, she's very good...when I left people were still ringing me up and saying 'please please' ...*
- Lucy: So thinking about some of that journey that you went through from being at school when you were really quite ambitious for yourself and you knew that you had ability and then through college through that stage after you had had the children and were getting back into work and knowing that you really had this potential but you don't feel that you are getting the recognition, do you think that that was just to do with kind of getting distracted by having a more liberal life or do you think that it was anything to do with your school experiences?*
- Bernie: It was a lot to do with my school experiences and thinking that I'm not that capable.*
- Lucy: Hmmm*
- Bernie: Or, 'cos you take on board what you see at school and you ... and think I can't do it, I'm not capable.*
- Lucy: And was that, was that the same story at college that you felt that*

there weren't any tutors who could help you?

Bernie: No

Lucy: Because you were obviously very motivated to learn, but something just got in the way.

Bernie: Yeah – it was just that idea.

B1: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

In this example I am using positive reframing, focusing on aspects of Bernie's abilities in order to communicate my positive regard, thereby attempting to develop trust, shared understanding and empathy. In my first response to Bernie here I am confirming that I have understood her (*'So people pointing out that you had particular skills in communicating?'*). In doing this I am both using my skills in empathy and knowledge of the discriminatory social and educational context that she is describing. In my subsequent comments I focus on affirming my understanding of Bernie's perceptions and feelings (*'So you felt that you wanted to do more?'* and *'So you felt that people were not valuing you and your skills?'*). In response to each, Bernie either confirms my reframing (*'Yeah'*) or clarifies her meaning further (*'Because I didn't have the paper behind me'*). My final comment in this extract summarises my reframing of Bernie's experiences based not only on empathy and careful listening, but also on my knowledge drawn from discourses within social work and education relating to discrimination (*'Because you were obviously very motivated to learn, but something just got in the way'*) to which she affirms *'Yeah – it was just that idea'*.

Beyond these verbal illustrations, much of the empathy and sensitivity that I expressed is not visible in text as it was communicated through body language and tone of voice. For example we sat without a table between us at approximately 45 degrees so that eye contact could be relaxed and not

confrontational. As I was using an audio recorder I did not need to take notes (another barrier to open communication) and was able to lean slightly towards Bernie with a relaxed and open posture. As suggested by Wengraf:

Non verbal communication is of great importance... Even if your paralinguistics are congruent with your words, your body language may be sending a different message. Consequently, very necessary to good interviewing is a high level of sophistication about listening to the paralinguistics of yourself and your informant, as well as staying aware of the non-verbal communication coming through body posture and body movement. (Wengraf, 2001, p. 4)

This combination of subject-specific knowledge and empathy can assist the researcher in responding flexibly to unexpected turns taken by participants and to respond with insights which provoke thoughtful exploration of the themes.

One of the benefits of taking time to allow trust to develop through the techniques discussed is that participants can offer additional insights to their experiences, which they may initially have withheld. In the interview with Bernie discussed here, she had originally positioned herself as having dropped out of college as she was distracted by an 'exciting life':

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Lucy: | <i>Oh, right so you went straight from school into college,</i> |
| Bernie: | <i>Yeah I didn't want to ... I went straight from school into college because, I mean jobs out there is easy to find factory work and stuff, but I, why don't you give that a try? I thought 'no' [with emphasis], so I wouldn't do that, and I went to college where I ...</i> |
| Lucy: | <i>What do you think went wrong at college, why was that not good for you?</i> |
| Bernie: | <i>Cos I, um I had lived such a restrictive life at home I think and when I went to college I think I found a different life out there. Exciting life. So, I went to college and I missed out a lot, didn't study enough, didn't take it serious enough. I was just not ready. I didn't realise how much input I needed to put in so I ended up not doing work there and after that went into care work, but that was on a YTS and</i> |

then I went into an adult programme working with children,
Lucy: *Right*

B2: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

In this first discussion of the topic, Bernie's suggestion that she left college as she '*didn't study enough*' and was tempted by a more '*exciting life*', illustrates her taking the full responsibility for her difficulties at college on herself. As the interview progressed, however, I am then able to return to the question of leaving college. She begins to express a more reflective account of her experience. Bernie acknowledges that her negative experiences of education in school had knocked her belief in herself as a child. In doing so she shares significant and painful personal experiences and lays some responsibility for her failure at college on her treatment in school, as illustrated in extract B2 above. This point of the interview brings Bernie back to memories which could have been painful for her:

Bernie: *Or, cos you take on board what you see at school and you ... and think I can't do it I'm not capable.*

B3: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Thus building up a degree of trust and empathy was important to help her to talk about her memories a little. This exchange took place in the final stage of the interview (page 11 of a 12-page interview). My verbal communication was supported by non-verbal cues, such as leaning towards Bernie, eye contact and an encouraging tone of voice. I also used what could be perceived as a 'leading question' to re-open this discussion ('*do you think that that was just to do with kind of getting distracted by having a more liberal life or do you think that it was anything to do with your school experiences?*') which, it could be suggested 'led' the participant resulting in an invalid response. Kvale

suggests, however that in qualitative research interviews the use of repeated leading questions can in fact enhance the reliability of interviews in that they test out the consistency of answers and also the accuracy of the interviewers 'interpretations'.

Kvale (1996) identifies eight different forms of interview questions, one of which is the 'interpretative question' which he describes as follows:

The degree of interpretation may merely involve rephrasing an answer, for instance: 'You mean that...?' Or attempts at clarification. 'Is it correct that you feel that...?', 'Does the expression... cover what you have just expressed?'. There may also be more direct interpretations of what a pupil has said: 'Is it correct that your main anxiety about the grades concerns the reactions from your parents?' More speculative questions can take the form of: 'Do you see any connections between the two situations of competing with other pupils for grades and the relation to you siblings at home? (Kvale, 1996, p. 135)

Interpretation is also a concept used in psychoanalysis, whereby the analyst offers an insight to the analysand of possible underlying motivations or meanings. Such interpretations may be based upon psychoanalytic theory or more simply rephrasing of the interviewee's words in order to clarify that both parties share the same understanding. In the example cited above, the interpretation could be seen as a leading question and is open to the criticism that the comment could distort the validity of the interview. The assumption that participants are unable to challenge interpretations which are incorrect, or resist leading questions has been challenged (Kvale, 1996) and demonstrated in this thesis, where participants challenged, qualified and corrected interpretations. In the following section I suggested that Bernie felt unsupported by tutors, again a 'leading interpretation'. This time Bernie challenges, and then offers an alternative reason for her ill-ease at college:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>And was that, was that the same story at college that you felt that there weren't any tutors who could help you?</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>No</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Because you were obviously very motivated to learn, but something just got in the way.</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>Yeah – it was just that idea. I mean even now when I'm writing I have to keep re checking and checking it whether I've put it the right English and I'm writing it the right way.</i> |

B4: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Here Bernie rejects the idea that her belief was that none of the tutors at college could help her, and instead suggests that it was the idea in her head that she had a problem with her written English, an inner anxiety which resulted in her needing to check and recheck her writing.

Knight (2002) suggests that the use of open-ended questions in interviews can be unhelpful in generating data for analysis as they result in incomplete responses, which are influenced by participants' current preoccupations or concerns. It is also likely that if the flow of interviews is entirely led by participants, there will be insufficient common ground to allow analysis across interviews.

The approach used in my interviews has allowed space for participants to draw the interview into areas of particular concern or interest to them, but has retained a sufficiently firm structure (around the guiding questions as well as through the use of leading questions) to allow analysis across interviews to be of use. In preference to interpretation, I have used the term 'reframing' as this suggests that I am only working with the information that the participant offers and re-presenting it, rather than making any psychoanalytically informed

interpretation of unspoken thoughts or feelings. Lacan (1964) supports the avoidance of interpretation of meaning, and instead suggests that in analysis the role of the analyst is to reflect back to the analysand what has (unconsciously) been verbalised. In analysis therefore, this process can enable the analyst and analysand can together explore unconscious thoughts and feelings which have inadvertently been verbalised.

4.10 Applying the principles of interviewing to telephone discussion interviewing

In approaching the telephone discussion with tutors, I intended to adopt the same principles as those outlined in 4.6.2 relating to face-to-face interviews:

- Participant involvement
- Recognising explicit identities resulting in situated, partial data
- Responding to unique experiences in the context of texts
- Recognising power dynamics
- Recognising emotion
- Empathic interviewing

There were clear differences between the student and tutor interviews, however, in that the tutors were not interviewed one-to-one or face-to-face but in a group using the medium of a telephone discussion. Despite these apparently key differences, the aims and principles were broadly the same. A focus on texts with the core aim of developing a participant involvement to reach a shared understanding remained central. As a small number of

individuals contributed based on their own personal experiences, data collected was necessarily partial and I was aware that individual contributions risked being influenced by the group context. This was eased by the relative parity of our roles as educators, although I retained a relatively powerful position as the designer of the research. I was particularly aware of this as I designed the feedback and grading of the assignments in such a way as to ensure that I was in possession of all the marked texts before the tutors shared these with each other. This was in order to reduce the potential for tutors to align their feedback with the majority under the influence of the group dynamics.

Identity remained a significant factor despite the relative anonymity provided by the telephone and the tutors were professionally and emotionally exposed by this exercise. Not only were private assessments made public, but contrasting professional judgements and beliefs were shared which required the creation of an accepting, non-judgemental and empathic context for discussion just as much as the student interviews. One particular example arose in the disclosing of grades, which had been sent to me in advance. The first two tutors to speak awarded a fail for the assignment which was the focus of discussion, but I was aware that not only had the third tutor given it a good pass mark, but that this matched the grade given by the original marker. I was concerned that the third tutor to speak in the discussion might feel reluctant to participate openly and that he might feel his professional judgement was challenged by the views of his colleagues. In response to this concern, I chose to disclose more information about the anonymous text than I might otherwise have chosen to:

Tutor 1: There is a lot, like [Tutor 3], I felt that to be honest all these specific areas asked of the student and the questions were not answered appropriately. I felt values were not really tackled at all and that we would like the assessment analysis of personal professional experience was very limited to their self-awareness. All sorts of assumptions in the essay and not been backed up by use of course material to support the thinking.

Lucy: Yes that's fine. Do you want to say roughly how you graded it Tutor 3 and Tutor 2?

Tutor 3 :I am always nervous about this because it turned out to be hard the last time we met as a group.

Lucy: If it makes you feel any better the grading ended up two of you grading (out of the four people, the original marker and you two) you in pairs, two identical grades. If that makes sense.

Tutor 3: Okay. I'd actually fail this one but very marginal and I would give him lots of positive feedback as well.

Lucy: Yep. [Tutor 1]?

Tutor 1: I failed it too. I gave 45%. I nudged it up a wee bit more.

Lucy: Hmm and just to make [Tutor 2] feel better before he comes in. The original marker gave it 70%. So [tutor 2] would you like to give your feedback?

Tutor 2: I found there are a lot of positives in this essay. I thought it was quite interesting and well thought out really and included a lot of reflection but I felt the reflection and I agree with my two colleagues that it was rather general and kind of academic style rather than a personal style...So I thought it was quite a lot in it actually. And I thought there was quite a lot of reference to the person's background and personal values particularly in the first section. Although obviously I think it could have been better and I probably marked it too high in the light of those comments really.

Lucy: Uhu, although your mark was almost identical to what it was finally marked as. So I think kind of these essays illustrate exactly the point we wanted to get at which is what do we value in essays. But anyway I don't want to talk too much so Tutor 3 would you like to talk through Text B?

Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002

This extract illustrates that Tutors 2 and 3 both demonstrated some anxiety about revealing scores, based on previous experience of marking exercises⁹. Tutor 2, who on this occasion was more generous than his peers, was able to provide his assessment and justify it to his peers, which I was concerned he may not have done if I had not revealed the grading of the original tutor to encourage him. It was important that as an interviewer I was able to be empathic and supportive to the tutors as individuals whilst also demonstrating an ability to join with their critical analysis of the texts and wider issues, without disclosing my own views about individual texts or their authors.

4.11 Data analysis

Analysis in this thesis has involved consideration of all the main sources of data (course materials, student interviews and texts and the tutor discussion) and mapping themes based in the research questions both within and across these main data sources. My starting point was two sets of student texts together with teaching materials and accompanying guidance from the two courses studied. An initial reading of these texts together with the course documentation in the context of my initial research questions enabled me to

⁹ The convention at the university studied was for groups of tutors marking assignments on the same course to undertake a marking exercise in which the same student text would be graded against the guidance and any discrepancies discussed. The purpose is to fine tune the guidance and achieve the greatest level of consistency possible in grading.

confirm particular areas of investigation. These included differences in writing and guidance between the courses studied and the experiences of students creating the texts. I was able to begin to explore the nature of expectations and guidance given to students through comparing documentation on each course for the clarity and consistency of advice. The ways in which this was interpreted by students and tutors together with their respective experiences of engaging in creating and commenting on these texts could only be gained through in-depth interviews.

It has been my intention to hold up for scrutiny and analysis those issues foregrounded by participants themselves, within the parameters of my questioning based upon the research questions. I have drawn together common themes through the use of summaries and tables used with the interview data (see Appendices 5 and 6) and texts comments (see Appendix 7). I listed key themes (as discussed in 4.4.3) in order to organise and compare the issues raised across interviews. Beyond my initial analysis of the full set of student texts, at the level of case study I have primarily used them as a focus and reference point for the interviews. I did, however, focus in on the use of first person singular pronouns in a broader analysis of texts. This analysis is discussed further in s 4.11.4 and 6.5. The use of case studies and also the textual analysis of first person singular pronouns are both examples of my use of progressive focusing.

4.11.1 Progressive focusing

The collection and analysis of data was an organic process, beginning with my own prior experiences and familiarity with the courses studied. I collected

a sample of 35 student texts and 15 hours of interview data. Analysis continued throughout the collection of data and the transcriptions of interviews, for example, were used as ongoing tools for analysis as I added more observations as my analysis developed (see Appendix 10). As my data collection and analysis progressed, however, I found it necessary to focus in more closely on particular aspects of the data in order to gain sufficient depth or breadth.

This process has been referred to as progressive focusing, a method which enables the qualitative researcher to analyse data during collection and thereby focus in (in or out) on specific themes or areas of interest:

Qualitative data analysis is an iterative and reflexive process that begins as the data are being collected rather than after data collection has ceased (Stake, 1995). Next to the field notes or transcripts, the qualitative analyst jots down ideas about the meaning of the text and how it might relate to other issues. The process of reading through the data and interpreting it continue throughout the project and the analyst adjusts the data collection process itself when it begins to appear that additional concepts need to be investigated or new relationships explored. Engel and Scutt 2005, p. 381)

There are four specific examples in my study of progressive focusing, the selection of case studies, my use of case studies, the tutor telephone discussion and my analysis of texts for the use of first person singular pronouns. The student interviews provided 15 hours of rich data, and for the purpose of detailed analysis and the presentation of findings in this thesis I worked in greater depth with the texts and transcribed interviews of 4 students developed as case studies. This process of 'progressive focusing' has enabled me to move from an extensive set of data from which broad themes were arising, towards case studies providing experientially rich detail.

My decision to recruit a small number of tutors, as described in 4.4.7, to participate in an anonymous marking exercise and telephone discussion arose from my initial analysis of written tutor comments on student texts. I was aware that tutors' experience was missing from my data and that this perspective was important in relation to a number of issues such as the differences in writing expectations between the practice learning course and the foundation course and students' interpretation of tutors' comments on their texts. This example of progressive focusing resulted in me seeking new data, therefore, which my initial analysis had highlighted as a significant gap. Another example of progressive focusing involved a specific deeper investigation into the whole sample of student texts which had otherwise primarily only been used in conjunction with interviews. My initial analysis of the full set of texts, together with my interviews with students highlighted the significance of the way in which writers in each of the courses used first person singular pronouns. I considered that this warranted further text-level investigation and so undertook an analysis of the frequency and context of usage of first person singular pronouns on each course discussed below in 6.5. Finally the importance of students' individual experiences encouraged me to take a case study approach to analysing the student interviews and text data. This involved focusing down from the 8 students interviewed to concentrate on 4 detailed case studies.

4.11.2 Case study as method

I have used the concept of 'case study' as a framework for the design and analysis of this study. Riessman (2003) argues convincingly for the legitimacy of a place for case study as a research method, particularly in the field of

health, which is closely related to social work. Health shares with the discipline of social work the use of case study as a key teaching tool. Its usefulness as a research paradigm has been uncertain, however, in part due to criticisms from positivist evidence based perspectives which have portrayed case studies as being no more than anecdotal. Riessman argues, however, that case studies can go further than merely illustrating phenomena (for the purposes of teaching) and can provide insight into expressive lived experiences which cannot be derived from other methods Yin (2003) also challenges the stereotype of the case study method as being insufficient in the areas of precision, objectivity and rigour and suggests that:

In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events... (Yin, 2003, p. 2)

The benefit of using case studies therefore is that they provide insights into contemporary human experiences in a real-life social context (Yin. 2003). In the context of academic writing, Lea and Street (1998) draw upon the ethnographic tradition represented by Mitchell (1984) in the following quotation:

What the anthropologist using a case study to support an argument does is to show how general principles deriving from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of particular circumstances. A good case study, therefore, enables the analyst to establish theoretically valid connections between events and phenomena which previously were ineluctable. (Mitchell, 1984 quoted in Lea and Street, 1998, p. 4)

In contrast to essentialist research designs which rely upon the use of comparative control samples, Yin (2003) suggests that case studies would be invalidated by controls and they pertain to a specific context and time which is

not replicable. Although findings from case study based research cannot lead to universal generalisable truths, they can be generalised for the purpose of developing theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003). The design of case study research, therefore, should be closely aligned with the theoretical frame within which the research questions are derived. Consequently there must be a close relationship between the research questions, the theoretical frame and the design of the case study. Yin suggests, for example, that the research questions should give a clear indication of the unit of analysis and therefore the focus of the case study.

In this thesis the unit of study could have been the individual student, the tutor group, the programme or even the year 2001 cohort of social workers in training nationally. Alternatively I could have focused on multiple units (more than one individual member of a specific group or several groups or programmes of study). Referring back to the research questions, however clarified the most effective unit of analysis. The questions were as follows:

In the context of a distance learning social work education programme:

- What are the requirements and expectations of different kinds of student writing?
- How do prior experiences (personal and educational) impact on the experience and practice of student writing?
- How do student and tutor identities influence different kinds of student writing?

Although the first question required analysis at the level of each whole course and a large group of students' responses to guidance, the second two focus specifically on individual student experiences. As Riessman (2003) suggests, they required a focus on expressive experiences and recognition of the identity and social positioning of both researcher and subjects. This approach led me to focus on the experience of individual students engaged in writing on social work programmes. As such, the units of analysis remained the individual students and I chose to select 4 individuals from the 8 who were interviewed on whom to base my case studies. These 4 students were selected because they enabled me most effectively to present the recurring issues which arose across the group whilst providing greater depth and richness of data. The scale of analysis required together with the importance of conveying the individual experiences of these students to the reader persuaded me to limit my case studies to 4 students, Bernie, David, Patricia and Pamela.

Analysis of the case studies came to the fore after the main themes or issues arising from the data set as a whole had been identified. In this way one of the functions of case studies could be argued to be theory building. The case studies enabled me to focus on the interviews and their associated texts in more detail in order to draw out examples to illustrate my arguments. For example, my second hypothesis was that the specific nature of the writing task influences both the way in which students engage with academic writing and also the feedback dialogue between tutor and student. My initial analysis of the full set of student texts and course materials led me to conclude that the greater importance of writing about personal experience on the practice

learning course significantly influenced the ways in which individual students approached their writing and also responded to the grading and feedback from tutors. My exploration of the four case studies supported this conclusion, and provided detailed evidence to support the argument that, whilst student writing was influenced by this requirement, the ways in which they were affected were very individual (as discussed further in 7.2, 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5).

The nature of findings from case study data are therefore very individual whilst also illuminating broader experiences and issues which are of importance to our understanding and theorisation of student writing and educational practices. The findings are intended to contribute to our understanding and theorisation of the experiences of students engaging in social work writing. Despite this study being small scale, I anticipate that the findings can be developed and build upon the theorisation of student writing generally and on social work programmes in particular. Parallels and conclusions that may be drawn from other programmes of study must therefore derive from this theorisation rather than from making generalisations from the experiences of these particular students.

4.11.3 Psychological influences on the analysis

In my interpretations of data I drew on the concept of the 'defended subject' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 19-21), who take a more clearly psychoanalytic perspective on research interviewing. This approach draws upon the psychoanalytic concept of 'defence mechanisms' discussed in 3.8.4. In common with Hall's discussion of translations (Hall and Maharaj, 2001), Holway and Jefferson (2004) challenge the transparency of communication,

suggesting that it is important to be aware of what is left unsaid, or disguised, because it is not understood by the subject themselves, is emotionally painful or involves revealing positions which for some reason are veiled. Hollway and Jefferson offer the concept of the defended subject from within a post-structuralist frame, fully aware of the implications of power imbalances and the consequent potential for distortion (Hollway and Jefferson, 2004, p. 19-21).

I found their perspective compelling as it provided a critical approach to drawing on the inner worlds of interviewer and interviewee in an analysis of the research interview. This brings the issue of identity to the fore in the context of the research interview. It also opens up the possibility of thinking about the potential significance of identities both foregrounded and veiled through the adoption of particular discourses which enables subjects to avoid more personally painful or otherwise undesirable identities. I have found this approach a useful and fascinating tool for reviewing my interviews and it has been influential in my analysis. One example has been in my analysis of the interviews with David, who drew upon a clear and credible academic discourse in his challenge to the validity of reflective writing as an assessment tool. His view that reflective writing is inherently incompatible with assessed writing would be supported by the work of Boud (1999) and is also consistent with social science discourse on the essay (Bazerman, 1981; Northedge, 2004) within which David studied his first degree.

4.11.4 First person singular pronoun use (I, me, my)

My interest in the way in which students were using first person pronouns arose from my initial analysis of the full set of student texts collected. I became aware of a difference in use not only in where first person pronouns most commonly appeared but also in the expectations conveyed to students. For example, it was evident on a first reading of the student texts that students wrote in the first person considerably more frequently in practice learning course texts than in foundation course texts. Advice in the written course guidance documentation did not provide explicit guidance on the subject, but comments from tutors through the telephone discussion suggested that students were expected to write in the first person on the practice learning course in particular:

Tutor 2: I have students in workshops and in (student texts), so they find it very difficult indeed to write essays from the first person perspective, some of them having gone through academic courses, although a lot of them haven't, where they have been asked to write typical undergraduate essays which is about other people's work and not their own.

Tutor 2: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002

Here Tutor 2 not only identifies that writing in the first person in an academic context is unusual for many students, but that in his experience students often find writing in this way a challenge. This led me to consider whether the relative incidence of first person pronouns across the two courses could be used as an indicator of the centrality of the self in each course text. I chose to focus specifically on the use of the first person singular pronouns *I*, *me* and *my* only. This was for two main reasons. Firstly *I*, *me* and *my* were the most common pronouns in my sample of texts and secondly I was particularly

interested in exploring first person pronouns as an indicator of the author writing about themselves in the context of their reflections on personal experiences.

Analysis of first person pronoun use can provide a valuable linguistic perspective through which to view self-representation in texts (Ivanič, 1996; Tang and John, 1999; Hyland, 2001; 2002,). Ivanič (1996) suggested that in general analysis of texts could provide an insight into the ways in which writers present themselves through their writing. Ivanič (1996) focuses on features such as pronoun use to explore the ways in which students position themselves in relation to academic discourses and their own identities, values and beliefs. Tang and John (1999), working in the context of Hong Kong drew upon Ivanič's work on pronoun use as an indicator of identity in texts and suggest that the writer's identity interacts in texts through three potential roles: societal roles, discursal roles and finally genre roles. Tang and John focus on genre roles, that is, the ways in which the writer appears in the text are dependant upon the specific text types. They propose six ways in which the writer may appear in the text and order them along a continuum according to the relative authorial power, 'I' as the originator being the most powerful and 'I' as the representative being the least powerful. These six categories are:

'I' as the representative (usually in the plural and speaking on behalf of an established position of discourse community)

'I' as the guide through the essay (the author guiding the reader through the essay)

‘I as the architect of the essay (the author indicating the structure of the essay)

‘I as the recounter of the research process (the author describing preparatory activities in creating the text such as primary research, often in the plural, or reading source texts)

‘I as the opinion holder (the author expressing a view on the subject within the text)

‘I as the originator (the author taking on an authoritative, authorial voice in the text)

Adapted from Tang and John (1999, p. 39)

I drew directly upon Tang and John’s taxonomy in analysing my own data, as I will explain below in this section. Tang and John’s study focused on academic writing based on a corpus of first year undergraduate English Language essays, and as such was concerned with students’ ability to marshal authoritative sources and develop an argument, as well as the degree to which students could achieve an authorial presence in the text.

Hyland’s research (2001; 2002), published during the course of my own study, adds a further interesting dimension to exploring pronoun use in academic writing. Hyland, who like Tang and John, worked in Hong Kong with speakers of English as a second language, undertook corpus research investigating the use of first person pronouns both in academic student essays and in published academic writing. Focusing on differences in pronoun use across disciplinary text types, Hyland explored methods of supporting students in

making informed decisions about their own pronoun use in academic writing (Hyland, 2001; Hyland, 2002). Hyland's work offers four distinct uses of first person pronouns, each associated with different verb choices, which he orders according to the level of authority implied. Here I present them in order from the least to the greatest level of implied authority:

- *Explaining what was done (I have interviewed ten teachers from six schools)*
- *Structuring the discourse (First, I will discuss the method, then present my results)*
- *Showing a result (My findings show that the animation distracted the pupils from the test)*
- *Making a claim (I think two factors are particularly significant in destroying the councils)*

(Hyland, 2002, p. 355)

Hyland challenges the traditional view, as expressed in extensive published guidance to students (Hyland, 2002, p. 351-2), that the use of first person is inappropriate in academic writing. He finds that this advice is not borne out in academic publications and also that there is considerable disciplinary variation in the frequency and context in which first person pronouns are used. Hyland did not include any disciplines closely related to social work in his corpus, but it is interesting to note that the one vocational / professional higher education discipline included (marketing) showed the most frequent incidence of first person pronoun use. Sociology, the only social science included, was mid-way through the ranking.

Although I did not encounter Hyland's work until I had completed my data analysis, his findings are of interest in the context of my thesis, as he

identifies a significant difference between pronoun use in social sciences and the loosely related professional or practice-based discipline of marketing.

These disciplines could be compared with the foundation course (as a social science subject) and the practice learning course. From my own experience of studying and teaching in the discipline of social work, I would anticipate that the practice learning course, in common with marketing, would have come towards the top of Hyland's list of disciplines in terms of first person use. This is because social work has a requirement that students include examples of personal or practice experience and also self-reflection in their academic writing, which necessitate the use of first person pronouns.

The research undertaken by Hyland and Tang and John provides a useful starting point to exploring the first person pronoun use in the social work student texts in my study. There are limitations in their taxonomies, however, due to the absence from both studies of disciplines which included reflective, expressive or narrative writing, such as the practice learning course.

In this thesis I have not taken a linguistic approach to the study of student writing. However, the use of first person singular pronouns has been of particular interest as it is so closely associated with the representation of the self in writing and as a tool used by students when writing reflectively about their personal experience. For the purposes of this study, as discussed further in chapter 6, I initially identified and counted each individual use of *I*, *me* and *my* for all of the foundation and practice learning course student texts (where a full set was available). Based on this initial analysis, I was interested in exploring how students were using first person singular pronouns.

I attempted to apply the taxonomy offered by Tang and John (1999) using their six categories. Such an analysis proved problematic as I was only able to identify three of Tang and John's categories ('I as guide through the essay', 'I as architect of the essay' and 'I as the opinion holder'). Moreover, the vast majority of uses of first person singular pronouns did not fit into any of the six categories identified by Tang and John. Due to this difficulty in applying Tang and John's taxonomy, I repeated my count of uses of the first person singular pronouns on the practice learning course and foundation course for all students who had contributed both texts. On repeating this count, I included two additional categories of 'I as narrator' and 'I as reflector'. I provide a fuller explanation of the definition of these categories and how I used them in 6.5.

4.12 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the types of data collected and where they have been used in this thesis. I have discussed the methods of data collection and rationale behind their use, focusing in particular on the interviews with students. My epistemological perspective strongly influenced the design of the research and also the selected methods of analysis. For example, my wish to facilitate student participation and acknowledge the influence of identity and role in the creation of data from the interviews influenced both the method of interviewing used. My analysis and data collection have progressed alongside each other through progressive focusing on the research questions. This technique resulted in a deepening of my investigation through the use of a case study methodology, working with the full set of student texts in relation to

a very specific question relating to the use of the first person pronouns and the collection of additional data from tutors to fill an important gap.

5. Chapter five: Student writing on the Diploma in Social Work: expectations of writing

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to expose the expectations that surround writing on the practice learning and foundation courses from three perspectives:

1. The course materials and associated written guidance (5.2-5.4)
2. The tutors (5.5)
3. The students (5.6)

In the first part of this chapter I will outline the expectations of students' writing on each course based upon analysis of the written guidance available to students, illustrating some ways in which this guidance could be potentially confusing or inconsistent. I then move on to compare the tutors' implicit understanding of the writing required and the student's experience of interpreting the guidance and engaging with writing on the two courses. This comparison suggests that there are very different writing conventions on the foundation and practice learning course which are not always transparent for students, but are implicitly understood by tutors. I will explore the students' experiences through the case studies of Patricia, Bernie, Pamela and David to illustrate the ways in which they individually responded to the common

experience of negotiating the implicit writing conventions identified on the practice learning course as compared to the more explicit guidance on the foundation course.

5.2 Exploring the written guidance

At level one (or the first year) of the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) students were required to undertake two courses, the practice learning course and the foundation course, as outlined in 1.8. The practice learning course (available only to social work students) was the first of two compulsory practice courses studied by DipSW students, the second being undertaken at level two. These courses involved the completion of assessed practice learning as well as written academic assessment. The foundation course is 'open' and as such had no entry requirements and could be studied by anyone with an interest in care. It is an academic foundation course which, although based on the applied social sciences, does not assess practice, and focuses on teaching study skills in preparation for further study at higher education level.

Students studying the Diploma in Social Work (DipSW) are provided with written documentation to guide them through each course, and inform them of the assessment requirements. These documents are as follows:

Figure 22: Summary of guidance documents

| Practice learning course | Purpose | Written for |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Programme Guide | Provides an overview of the whole social work programme, including the way in which each of the courses contributes. Introduces the practice learning courses in more detail and explains the | Tutor and student |

| | | |
|-----------------|---|-------------------|
| | role of assessment, including practice assessment | |
| Assignment Book | Outlines the assessment strategy, provides the assignment tasks and the marking criteria. | Tutor and student |
| Tutor Guide | Provides detailed advice on teaching, assessment and preparation for the face-to-face workshops | Tutor |

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| Foundation course | | |
| Introduction and study guide | Provides an overview of the course including the aims and learning outcomes. Introduces study skills, including the set study guide book and explains the role of assessment. | Tutor and student |
| Assignment Book | Outlines the assessment strategy, provides the assignment tasks and the marking criteria. | Tutor and student |
| Tutor Guide | Provides detailed advice on teaching, assessment and preparation for the tutorials. | Tutor |

The differences in expectations of students' writing between the courses will be considered firstly in terms of their stated aims, secondly the ways in which each course provides guidance on study skills, particularly writing and thirdly the assessment expectations of each course. A particular focus arising from a comparison of the assessment expectations is the relationship that each course has to practice and the related requirement to write about experience.

5.2.1 The aims of the practice learning and foundation courses

The stated aims of the practice learning and foundation courses provide an indication of not only the course content but also the purpose and demands of assessed writing required of students on the social work programme. The programme guide describes the practice learning course as being:

...very much about 'doing and reflecting'; it is based on your past and present practice as a social worker.

(Practice learning course, 2001)

and that compared with the foundation course, the practice learning course;

...concentrates more on writing about practice and learning how to generate evidence of competence...

(Practice learning course, 2001)

The practice learning course, therefore had practice at its core; 50% of the assessment relies on assessed practice and the written academic assessment is intended to enable students to demonstrate their ability to apply learning to practice through analysis and reflection. The academic knowledge acquired on this course is intended to underpin and inform the students' practice learning.

The foundation course is described within the University's publicity documentation as a:

...broad practical introduction to health and social care ...gives a grounding in the knowledge, skills and understanding required in caring work of all kinds...it prepares you for further study towards a diploma or degree.

(Foundation course publicity 2001)

This illustrates that although the foundation course is a 'practical introduction', it is essentially about developing knowledge rather than practice skills. This extract also flags up the importance of study skills, discussed in 4.4.8. The Introduction and Study Guide states that the aims of the foundation course were to enable students to:

- broaden your knowledge and deepen your understanding of caring in all its many aspects
- support you in developing study skills
- provide opportunities to explore the practical skills of caring and how to develop them to gain vocational qualifications

(Foundation Course Introduction and study guide, 2001)

Unlike the practice learning course, therefore, the foundation course does not involve the student in undertaking or reporting on actual practice and all the assessment is academic, (that is based on reading and theoretical discussion rather than based on accounts of practice) although this distinction is not clear-cut as will be illustrated below in 5.3. The following short extracts from the respective assignment guides illustrate the differences in focus for the assessed writing on each course. The assignment guide for the practice learning course suggests that:

The focus in assessing [the practice learning course] is on writing about practice, and generating evidence of social work competence. Competence in social work is defined as the product of knowledge, skills and values...'

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001)

Meanwhile the rationale provided for the foundation course is:

The [assignment] is an opportunity to show what ideas and knowledge you have learnt from the [course materials]

(Foundation Course assignment guide, 2001)

Thus the assignments map against the primary function of each course: the foundation course assessing students' ability to demonstrate knowledge through building logical, objective and evidence based arguments (Northedge, 1990, p. 143-4); the practice learning course assessing students' ability to relate theoretical learning to their developing practice skills.

5.3 Assessment expectations

5.3.1 Writing on the foundation course

Assessed writing tasks on the foundation and practice learning course are referred to as both 'essays' and 'assignments' interchangeably, and this practice is reflected in the speech of tutors and students, as will be seen in data presented throughout this thesis. Neither course treats the 'essay' as a contested or problematic text type. The work of Lillis (2001), discussed in 2.2.5, indicates the problematic way in which the term 'essay' is used loosely to refer to institutionally labelled text types which signal very specific writing practices. Although the use of 'social sciences' and 'essay' are problematic as they presume a common understanding and usage, these are the terms used in the course guidance and assumed by tutors and students to carry meaning.

Despite the problems associated with identifying a common understanding of the academic essay, as noted by Lillis (2001, p. 58ff), the foundation course contains extensive and relatively consistent guidance. The foundation course (which provides the majority of guidance on writing skills) requires students to demonstrate the ability to use their reading to develop an argument within guidelines which are associated with a 'social sciences' 'essay'. This is

provided both within the teaching materials (as study skills notes) and within the assignment book. Guidance provided within the set study book, the Good Study Guide (Northedge, 1990), suggests that students' 'essays' will be judged on their ability to:

... answer a set question, demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of new information, ideas and concepts, construct an argument, adopt an objective and analytical style and finally to write with clarity. (Northedge, 1990, pp. 147-155).

As a course aimed at students entering higher education with little or no prior academic experience, the foundation course explicitly sets out to teach its own version of the essay genre and guides tutors to assess student writing in-line with these expectations. The assessment criteria against which students' texts were assessed were as follows:

When marking your work, your tutor will consider the following questions:

- Have you clearly set out to answer the question and have you followed the guidelines?
- Does your answer show a good understanding of issues and arguments presented in the block?
- Have you drawn on relevant examples from the block to illustrate your points?
- Does your answer make appropriate links to 'real life'?
- Is the organisation of your answer clear and logical – presenting clearly expressed, well supported and well balanced argument?
- Is your style of writing clear and easy to read?
- Have you included appropriate references to show where you have drawn ideas, information and examples from?

(Foundation Course assignment book, 2001)

These assessment criteria highlight the importance of demonstrating knowledge and also the clarity and organisation of the essays. The

requirement to make 'appropriate links to real life' is expanded in some detail, instructing students to draw on examples of experiences of being a carer or care-giver to illustrate broader theory-based discussion. This use of experience should be 'brief', 'objective' and clearly linked to relevant knowledge gained from the course. In addition to generic course guidance relevant to all assessment tasks, the foundation course assessment criteria refer students to assignment-specific guidance. It is noteworthy that there is a high level of prescriptive detail provided at the task specific level, as is the fact that both students and tutors have access to the same guidance. The only additional information provided for tutors marking the foundation course relates to grading bands and admissible content rather than how students should organise and present their writing. The following extract from the foundation course assignment book aimed at tutors and students illustrates the level of detail provided for the first assignment:

If you turn to section 8 of this booklet ('How to make good use of your own experience') you will find an example of how to relate a case study of your own to these 'complications'.

When you have made some notes from your reading, jot down a few notes of what you might say in your essay. Then try sketching out some sentences to see how they look. You could aim to organise your answer something like this:

An opening paragraph explaining briefly why it is important to be able to say who is and isn't an informal carer, and introducing your chosen person.

A second paragraph which starts to explain why it is difficult to decide if someone is an informal carer, by taking the first of the four 'complications' and discussing

it in relation to your chosen person (don't forget to name the complication and explain how it related to your person).

Three more paragraphs doing the same for the other three 'complications'.

A concluding paragraph saying whether or not your chosen person is actually recognised as an informal carer, and whether recognition (or lack of recognition) makes any difference. Then comment on how this case illustrates the general problem of defining informal care.

This is just an idea to get you started, It isn't necessarily the best structure for *your* essay. You'll see that the example near the end of Section 8 deals with both interdependence and networks in the same paragraph.

(Foundation Course assignment book, 2001)

This level of prescription is not maintained as the course progresses, with guidance gradually decreasing as students are expected to build their skills. This example, however, illustrates the way in which students and tutors are provided with detailed and relatively consistent guidance.

Perhaps partly as a result of this guidance, students interviewed reported finding the foundation course relatively straightforward, David referring to it as 'formulaic' and Pamela suggesting that it was 'easier' than the practice learning course. Patricia and David also both identified the foundation course as having writing requirements similar to those they had encountered on previous degree programmes. Patricia commented in relation to the foundation assignment guidance that:

I didn't read it much, I didn't need them, I could do [with emphasis] (the foundation course).

P3: Patricia Interview: 14th June 2001

In summary, therefore, although the essay has been established through research as being a problematic genre (Street, 1984; Lea, 1998; Baynham, 2000; Lea and Stierer, 2000; Lillis, 2001), the experiences of students in this study were that the 'essay', as required of them on the foundation course, was relatively straightforward. The reasons for this could have been the level of prescriptive detail provided, and the relative consistency of guidance across different sources (such as the assignment book, tutor guide, set book and in-course study notes). In addition all the guidance was provided to both students and tutors, facilitating a shared understanding of what was required. This experience was not, however, shared on the practice learning course.

5.3.2 Writing on the practice learning course

Data from students and tutors suggests that the practice learning course required a very different approach to writing from the foundation course, despite not being presented as such in the course guidance. The consequence of these differences appears to have been that students and tutors in this study experienced the writing on the practice learning course as considerably more challenging. Students' grades on the practice learning course (across the whole data set) were lower than on the foundation course and, despite my questioning being comparative and introducing both courses equally (see appendices 3 and 4), students' discussion focused more on the practice learning than the foundation course (for an illustration, see Appendix 10 which contains a full transcript of my second interview with Patricia).

The guidance provided to students on the practice learning course was extensive and complex, and was spread across several documents, some of which are cross-referenced to foundation course documentation.

The Practice Learning Guide provided information on general submission procedures and generic assessment advice in addition to assignment-specific notes on content. The DipSW programme guide contains information on the assessment strategy across the whole programme, referring students to the national standards against which they are assessed, information on progression between levels and on exam boards. Finally, the foundation course (including its study skills set book) provides detailed but apparently generic guidance on academic writing, with very specific advice on essay writing. A close examination of the assessment criteria on the practice learning course illustrates that although they appear very similar to those of the foundation course (quoted above) bullet point 3 below marks an important departure:

1. Has the question been clearly addressed and have the guidelines been followed?
2. Does the answer show a grasp of the key issues and arguments presented in the course?
3. Does the answer indicate an ability to integrate learning from a range of sources, reading, practice, personal experience, in a 'reflective' way, that demonstrated critical analysis of practice?
4. Is the organisation of the answer clear and logical, with a clearly expressed, well founded and well a balanced argument?

5. Have references been appropriately cited and has a full references list been given at the end of the work?

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001)

Points 1, 2, 4 and 5 are very close to the criteria for the foundation course.

Point 3, however, contains a complex set of requirements relating to the critical and reflective use of personal and practice experience, which should be embedded in student texts. But it is the implicit interpretation of this point by tutors (as discussed below in 5.5) that created particular difficulties for students. This requirement, along with assignment-specific guidance, is the basis for two key features of the practice learning course:

1. It required students to discuss their own practice experiences and link these reflectively and critically to theory.
2. It required students to share personal experience, including discussing values to an unusually high degree.

The focus on experience and values on the practice learning course stemmed, in part, from the very different purpose of the assessment on the course. The practice learning course set out to teach and assess the application of theory and values to professional practice. The focus of the foundation course, in contrast, was to prepare students for undertaking academic study in the context of health and social care. Although values are not mentioned in the assessment criteria of either course, they are mentioned as required by the National Standards for social work education (CCETSW, 1995) and therefore feature in all of the practice learning courses' assessment tasks. These differences in the purpose of the courses had implications for the

ways in which students were expected to write. The requirement to write about experience, in particular personal experience, and values marks a departure from the essay genre taught on the foundation course. Although the inclusion of experience in writing was clear in relation to content, the implications of this for how students should write did not appear to have been made explicit for students or tutors. The implications of this inconsistency and the consequences of drawing such personal writing into the domain of assessed academic writing are central to my thesis. Sources of guidance for students and tutors about how to combine an academic essay with such personal writing will be discussed in the following section. The implications of attempting to achieve this somewhat vague target genre will be discussed more fully in 6.6.

5.4 Guidance on how to write on the practice learning and foundation courses

The practice learning course did not contain any teaching on writing or study skills, although it did direct students to the foundation course for advice. Students are advised in the practice learning course assignment guide that the foundation course set guide to study skills, The Good Study Guide

| |
|--|
| ...is a valuable source of advice, and you should use this, and the Study Skills boxes in [the foundation course], to help you to improve your assignment writing. |
|--|

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001)

The foundation course is described as providing teaching to enable students to develop 'study skills' intended to be applicable in future study, including on

the practice learning course. It does this through regular study skills notes and activities spread throughout the teaching materials and also through the set study book. The Introduction and Study Guide to the foundation course states that:

As a Level 1 course [the foundation course] assumes that you are new to degree level study and offers plenty of support in developing the skills for moving on to Levels 2 and 3.

(Foundation Course Introduction and study guide 2001 p. 5)

Within the foundation course materials, students are reassured that:

'The Good Study Guide will give you a thorough introduction to all the skills you need for success on this and any future courses you may take.'

(Foundation Course Introduction and study guide, 2001)

In addition to guidance on study skills provided in the foundation course, students are encouraged to access university-wide generic paper and online 'toolkits', which are offered to support students in developing structural language skills such as the appropriate use of grammar, syntax and punctuation. This guidance also appears to add to potential confusion, however, in relation to the requirement on the practice learning course to include accounts of personal and practice experiences and values. The following web-based toolkit on academic writing, which students were encouraged to access, illustrates some of the contradictions contained in written guidance:

Academic style

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| One key element of academic writing is to learn to move from the personal to the objective. The chart below shows how the two differ. | | |
| Personal | | Objective |
| personal writing | ➔ | more objective academic writing |
| telling your own story | ➔ | commenting on, analysing and evaluating someone else's ideas |
| using everyday words | ➔ | subject-specific vocabulary |
| information from your own experience | ➔ | using information from a variety of sources |

http://www3.open.ac.uk/learners-guide/learning-skills/english/pages/academic_2.asp
15/09/04 14.10

This toolkit is intended to support students undertaking the foundation course, including those on the DipSW, to improve their use of 'academic English'. It refers to writing 'style' which appears to refer to a range of issues including content, vocabulary and voice. The column on the right, headed 'objective' is intended to illustrate the target features of academic writing whilst the column on the left illustrates what is presumed to be the contrasting features of 'personal' writing with which students may be more familiar. There are a number of problematic assumptions here, including the assumption that students will share a familiarity with 'personal' writing and that all academic writing share the features identified in the 'objective' column. This is specifically problematic in relation to writing undertaken on the practice learning course. Although writing on the practice learning course is 'academic' in that it meets all of the criteria in the academic side of the table it is also personal, involves narrative (*telling your own story*) experiential (*information from your own experience*), emotive writing (*personal feelings and views*)

which at times involved the use of 'everyday' words, or conversational language. Students are therefore implicitly required to write in such a way as to meet apparently contradictory objectives and the written guidance does not signal the expectation on the practice learning course that students are required to meet the objectives on both sides of the table. This explicit difference in required *content* between the courses within the context of an *implicit* difference in writing conventions could be expected to lead to confusion on the part of students.

The social work students were, therefore, provided with several sources of generic teaching and support intended to help them develop writing skills, but these did not seem to take account of course specific differences in writing conventions. The message conveyed to students seemed to be that the academic writing skills taught on the foundation course and through generic toolkits were transferable across all courses, including the practice learning course. This is significant firstly because it masks the existence of disciplinary differences in writing conventions across the courses and secondly because, based on data from this study, this message proved unhelpful for students.

5.5 The implicit understanding of tutors about writing on the practice learning course

Based on data from the tutor telephone discussion, tutors appeared to share the expectation that students' writing on the practice learning course should differ from that on the foundation course. This was despite the fact that there

was no explicit written guidance informing students of this difference in expectations.

5.5.1 'A house style'?

All three tutors who participated in the telephone discussion were familiar with the requirements of the foundation course as well as the practice learning course. Two of the three tutors talked about an implicitly understood 'style' of writing shared by practice learning course tutors:

Tutor 3: I think [tutor1] used the word **house style** and I say to students it is not just, it is about cracking the code. ...it is a particular style of the social work essay, or what we are looking for in a social work essay, and it is hard for students to get the message especially when they have been undergraduates or have done other courses and have done [the foundation course] and they have been told in fairly rigorous structured terms on how to write an essay. Now we are coming on and saying well it is not like that, forget what you have been taught, the generic essay writing guidance that the [university] issue, not in the [assignment] book for the practice learning course but generically in the students' guidance, there is no relation really in many ways as to what we are asking them to do in the practice learning course. I'd tell them to chuck that out the window and forget it basically.

Tutor 3: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002

In this extract Tutor 3 suggests that writing skills taught on the foundation course, and previous undergraduate study, are actually *unhelpful* (*I'd tell them to chuck that out the window and forget it basically*) as preparation for writing on the practice learning course as it requires a different 'style' of writing. The use of the term 'style' is in itself unclear, but given that Tutor 3 suggests that a particular style is taught on the foundation course, s/he implies that style incorporates conventions relating content, organisation, voice, vocabulary.

The Good Study Guide, for example, suggests that the target style for the foundation course is 'not a narrative – it is an argument' and 'aims to be unemotional, detached and logical' (Northedge, 1990). Given that the tutors did not expect students to acquire an understanding of the different 'style' of writing needed for the practice learning course through the guidance or teaching materials, I explored with them where, if anywhere, such understanding was taught:

Lucy: Where is it that you feel that students are taught to do this very specific kind of writing, if anywhere? Do you see it as something that is taught in the course materials or that you teach or that students come with or that they learn it through experience or any other ways?

Tutor 1: I think clearly we can do that through feedback comments on the [feedback sheet] and on the scripts and I will quite often put down for example, use of an analogy of peeling back layers of an onion, to try to get students to go a bit deeper to explain a bit more or to take things on. The course is more a journey rather than a destination kind of thing. So I think you can phrase things on script and [feedback sheet].

Tutor discussion: 3rd September 2002

Tutor 1 identifies his own feedback comments as being the primary source of teaching for students to acquire the desired style of writing. There is also a suggestion that in order to achieve this style a student needs to continually 'go a bit deeper', although it is not clear from this extract in what way students are expected to go 'deeper'.

5.5.2 'Academic' versus 'reflective writing'

A dichotomy appeared from the discussion between the need for 'academic' writing and 'reflective' writing. Tutors suggested that both were needed in order to write a good assignment for the practice learning course but that

these two features were very difficult for students to combine in one text. By 'academic' writing, tutors seemed to be referring to writing containing the features of 'objective' writing referred to in the toolkit table in 5.4. 'Reflective' writing seemed to encompass writing which demonstrates the ability to share personal experience. Unlike the foundation course, which primarily uses case studies as the source of reflection, on the practice learning course students reflect on their own experience:

Tutor 3: I mean the use of case study in [the foundation course] requires a bit of a shift really. Because in a sense you are moving from case study to self aren't you?

Tutor 1: Tutor discussion: 3rd September 2002

Tutor 3 clarifies that on the practice learning course there is an expectation that writing incorporates both an 'academic approach' and 'the personal reflection' and that these elements should be integrated:

Tutor 3: There has to be a kind of integration of that academic approach with the personal reflection that the person needs to bring, in my view. A little bit of supporting evidence from sources outside themselves, as part of that reflective process, and I think that's what a lot of students find difficult.

Tutor 3: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002 [my emphasis]

The challenge of integrating these facets of writing is recognised, therefore by Tutor 3 but is further exemplified by the following comment from tutor 2:

Tutor 2: I tend to find that students who write a very academic and technical piece have great difficulty in getting into the kind of introspective, reflective approach. And some students can be very anecdotal and be quite reflective but don't make the links between professional practice, course materials and underpinning concepts. You have the two extremes and you are looking for something in the middle.

This comment suggests that students, in the experience of this tutor, tend to be good at one or other aspect of writing, but that most find it challenging to integrate them both. The requirement to achieve integration is an issue I return to in 6.3.1, where students talk of the difficulty they experience in drawing together academic and reflective elements of writing. This dichotomy between academic and reflective aspects of writing was further illustrated through the anonymous marking of two practice learning assignments, which I had asked the tutors to carry out (see 4.4.7). One of the two student texts was perceived by the three tutors to be more 'academic' and one more 'reflective' (see appendices 11a and 11 b for anonymised copies of texts A and B).

Although there was broad agreement amongst the tutors on the strengths and weaknesses of the two assignments, they were assessed very differently.

Text A was perceived as academically competent but 'distant', 'detached', 'far too philosophical' and 'lacking self awareness'. It was given the equivalent of a fail by two markers and a 2:1 by the other (and by the student's original marker). Text B was judged as making an 'honest attempt' at being reflective but lacking academic rigour, for example Tutor 3 commented that there was:

| |
|---|
| ... scope for more extensive use of sources and analysis. |
|---|

It was given the equivalent of a 3rd from two markers, a 2:2 from the other (and the student's original marker). The tutors involved appeared to identify similar features in the two texts, but differed on how to reward different aspects. The following comment is from Tutor 2 who passed text A with a 2:1:

Tutor 2: This is a very interesting and well thought out essay which includes a lot of reflection. However, it is in my view, written in rather general and academic style (not that academic is a bad thing!) rather than in a 'personal' style. I am left wondering a little about your actual values which I felt could be bit more explicit in part 1 and about the actual problems for you, rather than in general, in part 2.

Tutor 2: Tutor discussion September 3rd 2002: Commenting on text A

This extract illustrates the way in which Tutor 2 is struggling to articulate the demands of writing on the practice learning course which simultaneously needs to be both academically objective and openly personal. The following two comments are from Tutor 1 and 3, who marginally failed the assignment:

Tutor 2: The student writes almost as an intelligent observer rather than someone who will have to go in to work tomorrow and make decisions based on values, amongst other things, For me, this conflicts with competence based models of assessment, as in the DipSW.

Tutor 2: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002 commenting on text A

And finally:

Tutor 3: Style is difficult to follow –not practice-based enough. This is not what is looked for on the practice course. Very difficult to get a sense of the student and the practice here. A number of broad based statements have been made, but lack of depth, sufficient analysis of self and practice actually make this piece rather thin (beneath the veneer).

Tutor 3: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002 commenting on text A:

The comments of the original tutor of the author of text A mirror those above in asking the student to write less 'hypothetically' and to 'personalise' the writing. These comments imply that, although the student may have attempted to meet the requirements of the practice learning course, the student's text was viewed (negatively) as being substantially detached and

depersonalised. Whatever the motivation for the author's apparent reluctance to share more personal information, it appears that this failure to do so contributed to two out of four experienced tutors suggesting a fail grade for the assignment.

Text B caused less concern and was awarded a pass grades from all three tutors, despite concern that it lacked depth of analysis and rigour in relation to the use of quotations:

Tutor 2: I felt that the questions weren't really answered clearly enough, as asked of in the rubric. Although there was referencing, I put here 'little referencing', by that I mean I felt some things were aerosoled in but without much development, you know and I felt they, if you used the course material, then I would expect the student to take on quite a wee bit from, you know, just blanking something in sort of thing.

Tutor 2: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002

Despite these observations about clarity, referencing and the quality of discussion, all three tutors were more positive about the potential for the author of text B to improve and move closer to the target style than for the author of text A:

Tutor 1: I felt the student could have been more explicit more generally. I thought there were one or two errors spelling the author's names and so forth which I have said could irritate a rigorous marker. I thought they used limited resources and references reasonably well and I have said as the [assignment] writing progresses with the student, if I had been writing this for one of my own students I would say, there was probably scope for improving and extending the analysis.

Tutor 1: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002

A similar view was expressed by Tutor 3, who focused more explicitly on the development of reflective as opposed to academically 'well written pieces':

Tutor 3: [text] A is a technically better written piece of work. [text] B I think is better on the consideration of values. Now I am really very keen on well-written pieces of work, but you can work on that with the student who has got a basically decent level of literacy. What is harder to work on is somebody who is defensively academic, who won't 'give'. For them to work on their values is more difficult. So on balance I would say, for example, the person in script B she could be worked with beautifully to actually develop her writing skills and they are not a bad standard. I have seen a lot worse but they could be developed further. So I want to give plenty of encouragement and feedback on that. Whereas [text] A writer, it would be harder.

Tutor 3: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002

Tutor 3 is not explicit about what she means by 'well written pieces', but her allusion to the student's text being 'technically better' and demonstrating a 'decent level of literacy' suggests that she is referring to writing which meets conventional expectations in relation to surface features such as syntax and spelling. Tutor 3 associates such 'well written work' with what is described elsewhere in the interview as a 'more academic style', comparing this with the more reflective, but perhaps less correct writing identified in text B. Tutor 3 also makes the striking comment that she would find it harder to work with a student who would not 'give' rather than one who needed to develop writing skills. This comment provides an important insight into the implicit expectations of tutors in relation to sharing personal information, which is apparently not optional and is perceived as a core requirement. I return to the issue of sharing personal information in 5.6.

Data from the tutor discussion, therefore, suggests that there is a writing 'style' demanded by the practice learning course which is particularly complex and challenging to achieve due to the range of targets that need to be hit:

Tutor 3: It is very difficult for students to include everything they need to include in the social work essay such as values, theory, method, legislation and so forth.

Tutor 2: Tutor discussion: September 3rd 2002

5.5.3 A lack of clarity?

The interviews with tutors provided an important insight into the lack of clarity in tutors' common understanding of how to assess student texts on the practice learning course. Tutor comments contain numerous examples of vagueness and uncertainty. Tutor 2 talks of the way markers 'will kind of tune in' to student texts, Tutor 3 refers to looking for 'something in the middle' in relation to the balance between academic and reflective writing and also to tutors requiring a 'little bit of supporting evidence'. In all these examples tutors appear to struggle to explain their expectations of students' writing for the practice learning course. This lack of clarity illustrates not only the difficulty for tutors in arriving at a shared understanding in order to achieve a common marking standard, but also the reason for the level of confusion experienced by students, as discussed below in 5.6. The ambivalence evident in data from tutors also demonstrates the value of interview as a technique. Tutors' discussion of their experiences of assessing student writing provides a window onto the assessment of student writing unavailable from the course guidance or comments on texts.

5.6 The experiences of students

In the following section I offer data from the interviews with the 4 case study students, Patricia, David, Pamela and Bernie. These case studies suggest that the participants interviewed faced particular challenges in writing the practice learning course assignments which were not encountered on the foundation course. Data from student interviews suggests that students interpreted the written guidance provided (discussed in 5.2 and 5.3) as an indication that rules of writing learnt on the foundation course should be applied to the practice learning course. The interchangeable use of the terms 'assignment' and 'essay' also led students who had prior degree-level study to presume the acceptability when writing on both courses of drawing upon academic writing conventions associated with the essay learnt from previous courses of study. Students also found that the particular requirements in relation to sharing personal experience in the practice learning course presented a challenge.

5.6.1 Grades as indicators of success?

A consistent theme arising from all of my interviews was the discrepancy in grades between the practice learning course and the foundation course. Students attributed the reasons for this discrepancy differently, but all shared the same experience of receiving lower marks for their writing on the practice learning course than on the foundation course. The following table illustrates the discrepancy in grades between the courses at the mid point stage:

Figure 23: Comparison of grades

| Student | Practice learning course 2 nd assignment | Foundation course 4 th assignment | % Difference + or - |
|---------------|---|--|---------------------|
| 1 | 55% | 64% | +9% |
| 2 | No comparative data | | |
| 3 | 73% | 90% | +17% |
| 4 (Pamela) | 60% | 80% | +20% |
| 5 | No comparative data | | |
| 6 | 54% | 80% | +26% |
| 7 | No comparative data | | |
| 8 (David) | 70% | 94% | +24% |
| 9 | 34% | 65% | +31% |
| 10 | 66% | 88% | +22% |
| 11 | No comparative data | | |
| 12 | 60% | 85% | +25% |
| 13 (Patricia) | 67% | 77% | +10% |
| 14 | 60% | 82% | +22% |
| 15 | Non participant | | |
| 16(Bernie) | No comparative data | | |

This data indicates that students in this study were awarded between 9% and 31% higher grades for their foundation course written work. The 4 students with no comparative data completed the foundation course prior to my study, so their written texts were not available for inclusion. While students reached their own personal conclusions about differences in grades (discussed further throughout chapters 6 and 7), there was also an institutional explanation

which students may not have been fully aware of. The assignment book for the foundation course advised tutors and students that:

In giving grades for your early assignments your tutor will make allowances for the fact that you are still getting the hang of things. But by the later assignments you will be expected to have a reasonable idea of what is wanted. In other words, standards are applied a bit more strictly as you go along.

(Foundation Course assignment book, 2001, p. 12)

This guidance was reinforced in the assignment specific guidance on grading each piece of work provided to tutors only. The reason for this guidance was that the foundation course was a 'supported' first level course, which meant that (as discussed above in 1.8.1.2) its assessment strategy aimed to enable inexperienced students to gradually build their academic skills over the nine months of the course. To achieve this, tutors were advised to begin with a very low pass threshold which should gradually increase through the period of continuous assessment. This strategy was employed to encourage and support students who began the course with little or no prior experience of academic writing. The final assignments and end of course examination were assessed at level one, and so it was expected that students were performing at this level by the end of the course. No such system of escalating expectations was explicitly applied to the practice learning course, which may in part explain the discrepancy between the foundation course and practice learning course grades, based on the texts included in my data which were mid way through both courses. However, students did not seem to be aware of this system.

None of the interviewees mentioned the difference in assessment strategies between the two courses, but all commented on the difference in their grades and Patricia and Bernie attributed this in part to the strictness of the marker. According to Patricia, her practice learning course tutor also told his tutor group that he was a severe marker:

Patricia: I know that [practice learning tutor] is a hard marker and he made that absolutely clear when he started

P4: Patricia interview: 14th June 2001

Whilst the practice learning tutor's comment may have been accurate (for example he may have received feedback from his moderator¹⁰ that his grading was relatively severe), the student experience also should be considered within the context of the programme as a whole. Patricia and David spoke very clearly about their own journeys towards appreciating the way in which the practice learning course required a very different kind of writing from anything they had experienced previously in higher education.

5.6.2 “Its getting it down in a format that’s acceptable to the university” (Patricia)

Patricia was confident in her academic writing skills as well as her ability to write fictional and experiential narratives, enjoying writing stories and long letters. When she wrote the first assignment for the practice learning course,

¹⁰ At this university all tutors marking is sampled by an experienced colleague (the moderator) who comments on both the assessment and quality of comment offered to the student.

she did not appreciate that anything different was required of her writing from either previous academic study or the foundation course. Patricia was consequently surprised by grades and feedback on her first two pieces of assessed writing. She spoke of the frustration that she felt; she thought that the particular 'style' expected on the practice learning course should have been made explicit, for example through a preparatory workshop:

Patricia: What we should have had, Lucy, to start with was some sort of workshop giving us an idea of the style [for the practice learning course], it's the style that is so different because D [the practice learning course tutor] wants 'I want, I think, I feel, I felt' whereas the, the foundation course is looking at writing in the third person, but D - well, you write that to your auntie Jane you don't write it for a course. I've never written it for a course.

P5: Patricia Interview: 14th June 2001

This extract from Patricia's interview highlights one of the most significant differentiating features between writing on the practice learning course and the foundation course. This difference is the requirement to write using the first person, making the 'self' the primary subject of discussion and analysis. The use of first person pronouns will be dealt with in some detail in 6.5. Underlying Patricia's comment, however, is also an important statement about the expected content in relation to the self. This requirement raised a number of emotive and identity issues for students, which will be dealt with in more detail in chapters 6 and 7. In the context of this chapter, Patricia's comment appears to support the existence of a 'house style' on the practice learning course which, according to data from tutor discussion, students were taught through feedback rather than through written guidance. Data from Patricia, Bernie and Pamela suggests that they found feedback from their tutors

inconsistent either between assignment tasks or with their understanding of the written guidance.

In the following extract from my second interview with Patricia, she picks out some specific positive comments noted by her tutor:

Patricia: I mean in his comments he talks about you know that I had worked hard to produce an essay that is honest, reflective, thought provoking flows well, follows the structure, well laid out, cases are very powerful and in the end [reading from the text] all in all a very powerful read [Patricia] well done.

P6: Patricia Interview : 14th June 2001

This comment hints at the complexity of what was expected of students from their writing on the practice learning course (honest, reflective, thought provoking, flows well, follows the structure, well laid out, cases are very powerful). Three key words here (honest, reflective and powerful) are associated with the requirement that students do not write dispassionately as may be expected of academic writing on the foundation course, but very personally about their own experiences and values.

5.6.3 “A slightly less academic essay” (David)

David also began the practice learning course with the expectation that he would be writing what he understood to be ‘academic essays’. Feedback on David’s first assignments, however, challenged his understanding of what constituted ‘good academic writing’:

David: The challenge has not been the writing, the challenge has been I suppose not writing an academic essay.
Lucy: Uhu
David: Because I thought that an academic essay was required rather than, I think what appeared to be required, is I suppose, what I wrote was an academic essay for my first one and what I have written for my

second one is a slightly less academic essay.

D2: David Interview: 17th April 2001

David struggled to find words to describe what was required of his writing for the practice learning course, describing it as being ‘*a formula I haven’t cracked*’ (David interview 17th April 2001). He discovered from the grade and feedback on his early assignments that in writing what he perceived as an ‘academic essay’ he was not meeting the tutors’ expectations:

David: On [the foundation course] I’ve been getting sort of from 80s to 88s
Lucy: Hmmm
David: And yet for [the practice learning course] I’ve been getting 60s, 63, 67 and that’s because I find it much more difficult to write about the kind of less formal, less structured way

D3: David interview: 5th July 2001

In this comment David points to two problematic issues for him, the unfamiliar writing conventions (‘less structured way’) and his personal discomfort in writing about himself (discussed below and more extensively in 7.5).

5.6.4 “The writing is completely different” (Pamela)

Pamela also suggested that the requirement to recount experience and reflect upon it involved a more complex use of tenses, which she found difficult:

Pamela: I feel that the style of the writing is completely different as well, in what tense you write in and things like that there are things like that I found difficult like I found I was going from past to present quite a lot.

PM2: Pamela Interview 2nd July 2001

By this Pamela was referring to the need to move between the past, the present and the future in order to meet the practice learning course’s requirement to recount experience (past), evaluate practice experiences using theory (present) and then reflect upon applying new learning to future practice

(future). Pamela's writing does indeed move between extensive passages in which she narrates experiences in the past tense (At the age of seventeen I was offered a job) and then moves into explaining how she acts now or will do in the future. In these sections she uses a combination of the future tense (I will show) and the present conditional (I would give). In the final section of her text, she uses a combination of tenses:

Well, you have just read the account of my first day in the caring profession, which was eight years ago, but I can still recall it as if it had happened last week. It had a huge impact on how I deal with meeting new people both professionally and personally. I believe that a first impression is the most important influence you will ever have on a person's opinion of you, or the service you represent.

Pamela Practice learning course assignment 2 [my emphasis]

In this extract I have underlined the tenses used, which move from the past perfect (have read) to the simple present (I can recall, I believe), to the future again. Although Pamela's impression that she used a more complex combination of tenses on the practice learning course is borne out in her texts, there is no evidence that she was unsuccessful in using them appropriately. This suggests that the complexity of the writing generated an anxiety for Pamela, despite the fact that she had the writing skills to manage the task well. Pamela's confidence in her writing will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.6.5 “You’re just writing and making sure that everything is there” (Bernie)

Unlike David and Patricia, Bernie did not conclude from her feedback that a different kind of writing was required on the practice learning course. Having

had a very positive experience of developing her writing skills when she studied the foundation course (a year prior to beginning the practice learning course) she was confident in her ability to 'structure' her work, a term used by Bernie to encompass not only the organisation of her text but also other features, such as syntax, and indeed content. Her faith in her foundation course tutor apparently gave her self-belief in her ability to write. When her grades and comments on practice learning course assignments did not meet her expectations, Bernie felt annoyed:

| |
|--|
| <p><i>Bernie: That's why I was annoyed that he [the practice learning course tutor] put down that my structure wasn't clear because I aim to make my structure clear.</i></p> <p><i>Lucy: Yeah.</i></p> <p><i>Bernie: I'm not trying to be big headed.</i></p> <p><i>Lucy: Yeah.</i></p> <p><i>Bernie: But I struggled with that and once I have got... I get something I never sway from it.</i></p> <p><i>Lucy: Hmmmm.</i></p> <p><i>Bernie: And I got that from doing [the foundation course]</i></p> |
|--|

B5: Bernie Interview: 18th June 2001

The unexpected criticism of her 'structure', when Bernie believed she was applying previous learning consistently, made her angry. Bernie directed this anger at her tutor who, in Bernie's view, was introducing inconsistent expectations. Despite having read the written guidance meticulously, Bernie did not seem to question whether the practice learning and foundation course might require something different from her writing. Even by my second interview with Bernie, she indicated that in her opinion there were no differences between the writing requirements of the two courses.

Bernie does, however, express anxiety about the number of 'rules' which she feels she needs to take account of when writing. In talking about her final assessed text during the practice learning course Bernie comments on how scared these rules make her feel about writing.

| | |
|----------------|--|
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>They give you so much rules, you can't do this and you mustn't do that, you must ensure that you do this and if this is missing blah blah blah, there is so much you have to remember that you just get scared, scared that you are going to miss something out. There is so much to remember that you might miss it out...</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>What effect do you think that had on the way that you expressed yourself?</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>It [the amount of 'rules'] had a lot of effect [laughs] because you are just writing to pass.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>You're not, you can't express yourself and you can't, you're just writing and making sure that everything is there.</i> |

B5: Bernie Interview: 18th June 2001

Ironically, Bernie experiences these rules as impeding her ability to write reflectively, to express herself. She does not specify in which documents she drew out these rules, but the written guidance relevant to assessment on the practice learning course is extensive, as discussed above in 5.3. Whilst neither the teams that produced the practice learning course nor its tutors may have intended that students actively use all of this guidance in writing practice learning assignments, Bernie experienced this extensive advice as an overload of 'rules'.

5.7 Conclusion

Data discussed in this chapter suggests that students who undertook the practice learning course and the foundation course were required to negotiate some substantially 'mysterious' institutional practices (Lillis, 2001). Academic

writing on both courses was presented in written guidance as involving 'essays' based upon the conventions within the 'social sciences'. This was problematic partly due to the diversity of writing practices contained within the concept of the 'essay', as discussed above in 2.5.2, but also because of differences in expectations of students writing within the courses themselves. Within the context of an academic literacies approach to student writing, discussed above in chapter 2 (Lea and Street, 1998; Lea and Stierer eds., 2000), the presumption of a generic set of academic writing conventions is problematic, even within one 'discipline' and this is compounded where one course of study includes diverse disciplines. The foundation course, as a broad theoretical course providing the knowledge underpinning care, drew upon a range of social science disciplines, including sociology, psychology and social policy. This is significant as it places the foundation course within the collection of 'new discipline areas' (Baynham 2000), which draw on multiple disciplines, and discourses not only in the content but also in the conventions of writing expected of students. In his study of nursing students, Baynham (2000) identified that students encounter multiple discourses and writing styles, and this is also the case for social work students.

While disciplinary diversity is one contributory factor to differences in conventions of writing between the foundation and practice learning courses, such conventions are compounded by the specific assessment methods and guidance provided by each course. The writing expected for the practice learning course is not only different from that taught in the foundation course, but the conventions of which appear to be taught through the feedback on texts from tutors. The written guidance advises students to use the study skills

teaching provided within the foundation course, while tutors recognised that something different was needed and provided guidance through feedback.

This tutor guidance had the potential to be particularly inconsistent as, based on the anonymous marking exercise and discussion, the tutors varied in the features they valued and spoke in very imprecise ways about their expectations. The sensitivity and intimate nature of the required personal reflection potentially demands a level of trust and rapport not usually associated with academic writing. Finally, the tutors viewed the practice learning course writing tasks as both more challenging and more difficult to mark. These issues raised by tutors appear to be consistent with the experiences of students, who found the practice learning course assignments and feedback a confusing and emotionally bruising experience.

6. Chapter six: reflective writing in social work education

6.1. Introduction

In chapter 5, I presented data from the course guidance, interviews with students and the tutor discussion which suggested that the writing expected of students on the practice learning course was significantly different from that on the foundation course. This difference was masked by written guidance, which implied that academic writing conventions based on essayist practices were straightforward and transferable across both the foundation and practice learning courses. In this chapter I will focus primarily on the experiences of students undertaking assessed writing on the practice learning course. I draw upon the case studies of Patricia, Bernie, Pamela and David to present data relevant to their experiences of engaging in reflective writing and the particular writing practices that each student developed in order to manage the writing tasks on the programme. I outlined my conceptualisation of writing practices in 2.3, and in my use of it here I am foregrounding the three dimensions identified there: the circularity of the actions involved in writing practice, the importance of human interaction and the recognition of emotion.

The chapter is organised into four broad areas of discussion, each focusing on one of three themes which were common to all of the students in their experience of reflective writing. These themes are:

- Managing the tensions (between ‘academic’ and ‘personal’ elements of the writing)
- The impact on the writing tasks of sharing personal experiences
- Use of first person singular pronouns

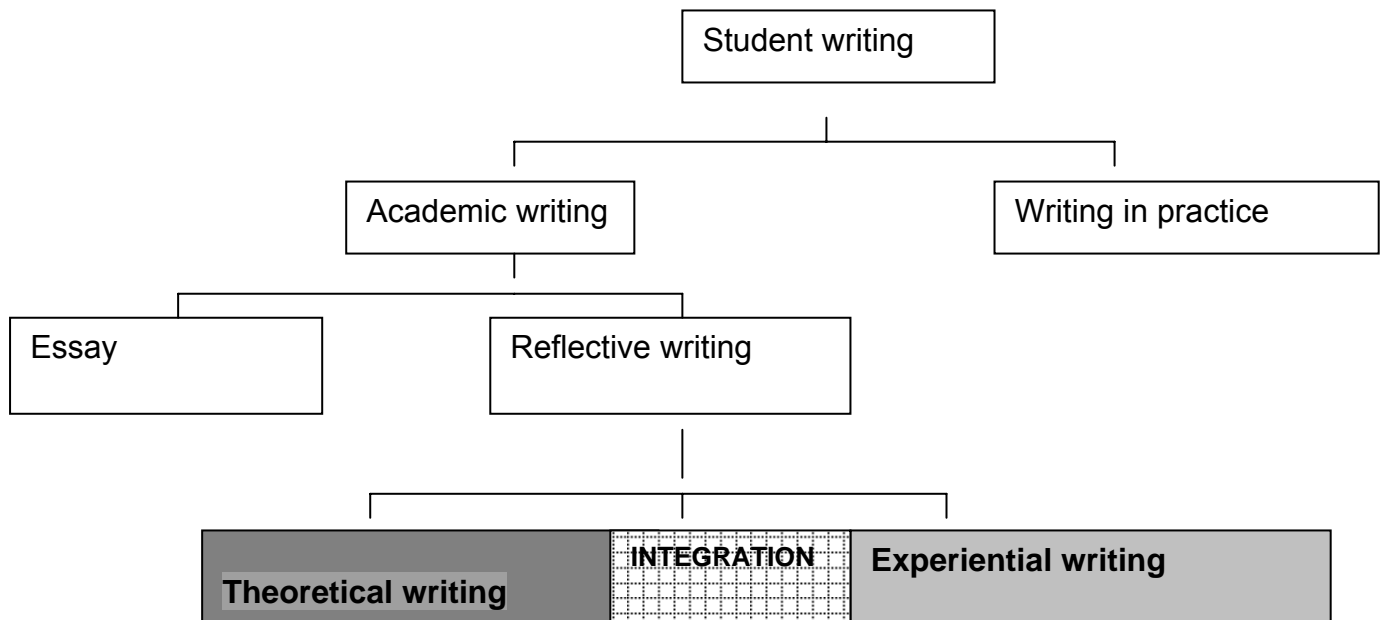
Evidence from each of the four case studies is presented under these themes in turn. ‘Managing the tensions’ refers to the diverse ways in which students developed writing practices to negotiate the conflicting information about how they should write within the context of the particular demands of the practice learning course. ‘The impact of sharing personal experiences on the writing task’ explores the ways in which students interpreted and responded to the different ways in which they were expected to write about personal experiences on the practice learning course and the foundation course. ‘Use of first person singular pronouns’ draws upon the heuristic developed by Tang and John (1999) discussed in chapter 4. I will provide a brief analysis of the ways in which students appear to be using the first person on the practice learning and foundation courses.

From this point on in my thesis I draw a distinction between academic writing described as an ‘essay’ (exemplified here by writing undertaken on the foundation course) and ‘reflective writing’ (exemplified by writing undertaken on the practice learning course). This form of academic writing is distinct from what has often been referred to as ‘reflective writing’ as discussed in 2.5.2 (Walker et al., 1985; Boud, 1999; Moon, 1999) in that it is assessed and requires very specific treatment of experience and values integrated with theory, as I explain in the following sections.

6.2 The nature of reflective writing

I established in chapter 5 that tutors had significantly different expectations about student texts on the practice learning course and the foundation course. This led me to draw a distinction between the ‘essay’ as constructed by guidance on the foundation course and what I am calling here ‘reflective writing’. One of the clearest distinguishing features, based on data from the tutors and course guidance, appears to be the requirement for students to successfully integrate discussion of theoretical knowledge with personal experience. I will refer to these two specific dimensions of reflective writing as ‘theoretical writing’ and ‘experiential writing’:

Figure 24: Social work student writing



The above Figure illustrates the levels involved in social work student writing, divided broadly into academic writing and writing in practice. This thesis is concerned only with the academic writing, practice writing referring to a

diverse range of writing undertaken whilst students undertake learning in the field, such as letters, reports, meeting minutes and recording of interventions. Within the sphere of academic writing, I have identified at least two distinct text types required of students, the 'essay' and 'reflective writing'. Whilst the term 'essay' is used with caution, as I recognise the diversity of institutional practices that lie behind it, it serves the purpose in this thesis of marking a distinction between the writing conventions broadly applied to the foundation course in comparison with the reflective writing required on the practice learning course. Focusing in on reflective writing, tutor data suggests that there is another distinction which I am referring to as 'theoretical' and 'experiential writing': the former refers to writing within reflective writing which demonstrates theoretical understanding or knowledge based on sources other than experience; 'experiential writing' refers to the unusually personal domain of experience which is a required element of reflective writing. It includes both practice and personal experience and involves discussion of personal and professional values and personal change. In Figure 24 I have overlapped the theoretical and experiential elements as, according to data from tutors, the target is for these elements to be integrated, although they also acknowledge the considerable challenge involved in doing so.

In this chapter I will be focusing on reflective writing and in particular on the ways in which students reported their experiences of engaging in writing about experience in the context of theory on the practice learning course. Although the foundation course also encouraged students to use specific experiences to illustrate knowledge gained from the course, such experiences were of a different order. This is because experiential illustrations were

required to be objective and to be secondary to demonstrating knowledge and understanding within specified limits of objectivity, brevity and relevance:

And remember that your experience by itself doesn't *prove* anything. You are too involved in it to be a reliable witness. It is simply useful illustration.

(Foundation Course assignment book, 2001, p. 6)

However, assessment criterion 3 of the practice learning course, discussed above in 5.3.2 and repeated here, suggests that the inclusion of discussion of personal experience and values is of equal importance along with other 'sources' such as 'reading'.

3. Does the answer indicate an ability to integrate learning from a range of sources, reading, practice, personal experience, in a 'reflective' way that demonstrates critical analysis of practice?

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001)

Further evidence of the centrality of experience and values on the practice learning course is to be found in the assignment questions themselves and the accompanying guidance. This suggests that there are some significant differences in expectations of student writing, such as the inclusion of personal experience, which are played out through tutors' feedback and grading of assignments. In the following extracts from the first assignment on the practice learning course, I have underlined the references to experience and values:

Read the course materials in study Unit 1, paying special attention to the sections on Biography and Identity.

Write a commentary on these sections, in which you are required to:

1. Describe those personal experiences you consider to have been particularly important for your professional development
2. Explain which aspects of the course materials seem especially significant to you both personally and professionally
3. Discuss one practical personal experience that has affected your practice and values and give examples of how it has done so

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001, p. 9)

Similarly in the second assignment:

1. Describe how your previous practice experience has affected your personal values and the ways in which they have changed in response to that experience
2. Describe your current understanding of professional social work values and how you have arrived at this understanding. Outline those issues which you find problematic and want to work on during your present placement.
3. Illustrate your answer with examples from your previous and present practice.

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001, p. 10) [my emphasis]

These assignments illustrate the centrality of personal and practice experience and values, but also of the requirement to demonstrate personal change through writing. The requirements are presented as relating to content with no recognition or discussion being offered that such assignments will

involve significantly different demands of students' writing nor the unusual nature of such content in the context of academic writing. As will be discussed in the following section, these requirements had significant implications for both students writing on the practice learning course and tutors assessing such texts.

6.3 Managing the tensions

All of the students focused their discussion more on the practice learning course during their interviews, presenting writing on the foundation course as either more familiar to them or problematic. Individual responses to writing on the practice learning course varied, however, depending on each student's experience of attempting to manage the tensions that arose for them in negotiating an unfamiliar set of expectations.

6.3.1 Integrating experiential and theoretical writing

Tutors interviewed claimed to reward an integration of theory and experience on the practice learning course and saw this as a distinguishing feature of the course compared with the foundation course (see 5.4 above). Tutors also acknowledged that achieving such integration was a challenge, and this was borne out by the ways in which students managed the task, with all of the case study students opting for a degree of separation of theoretical and experiential writing. On the practice learning course, such a separation was facilitated for students by the assignment question being presented as involving three steps (see above in 6.2), firstly requiring students to focus on personal reflection, secondly to offer an interpretation of professional values

and the thirdly to illustrate their answer from practice. Analysis of the case study of Patricia provides an insight into why she elected to separate experiential and theoretical writing, both in her mind as she drafts and in her final text.

Patricia divided her practice learning assignment into two halves, the first focusing on experiential writing and the second part on theoretical. In part one for example, she includes only one reference to an authoritative source, her discussion focusing on her own experiences whilst in part two she includes more theory, a total of eight references to authoritative sources. Even within part two, however, Patricia does not integrate her experiential and theoretical discussion. To illustrate this point, I have included a copy of the second half of Patricia's practice learning assignment 2 for reference (Appendix 12b). In this assignment the knowledge, or theory, used relates to professional social work values and ethics rather than law, which was the example she discussed in her interview (see extract P8 below). In the second half of this assignment paragraphs 1, 5 and 7 do not include any personal experience but instead offer discussion of authoritative sources that Patricia selected as relevant to her discussion. The remaining paragraphs contain no references to external sources; they include Patricia's narrative accounts of her personal experiences and reflection on these narratives. On the foundation course, despite its practice orientation, such a division between theory and 'practice' is not evident in Patricia's text, and use of theory and referenced sources are evenly spread throughout her assignment.

Based on her interview, Patricia did not appear to find sharing personal information particularly difficult. Her frustration was that the requirement to do so was not made clearer earlier in the course (as discussed in 5.6.2.). Once she was aware that she was expected to write differently on the practice learning course from the foundation course she found including experiential alongside theoretical writing made the process of crafting her writing difficult and time consuming. Verbalising and then translating her ideas into writing was considerably more of a challenge for Patricia when the subject of discussion was herself and her own values:

Patricia: They (values) are implicit in my work but I struggled to find it, I needed to have a right good look at what I'm doing and think, well oh yes, in this particular piece of work well the fact that I did this means that I must've thought that ... I mean you don't go around every day acknowledging your personal values, you've got to think about what they actually are.'

P7: Patricia Interview: : 14th June 2001

The thinking processes involved in writing about personal values and experiences resulted in Patricia mentally partitioning writing about her personal experiences, values or feelings (what I am calling experiential writing) from writing about the knowledge that she had acquired from the course such as 'legal stuff' or theoretical writing:

Patricia: I'm writing what I'm thinking and then I'm thinking, oh no I'll change the tense on that or re-read that bit and then think oh yes I can put that in here you see here. I'm going through and thinking oh yes well I did that here so when I come to type it up I need to put something about that there and something about that in there but I can't get my head around thinking what that is because that's legal stuff and I'm not doing legal stuff I'm doing guts you know got to write about feelings blah blah blah so I'll just put that in and when I come back I'll add that.

P8: Patricia Interview 1: 14th June 2001

The extract above illustrates some of the complexity that Patricia indicated that she had to deal with in the practice learning course texts. Patricia refers to theoretical writing '*legal stuff*' (or evidence of her learning from the course materials) and experiential writing '*guts*' and her experience of trying to include both in her texts.

Patricia's difficulty integrating experiential and theoretical writing on the practice learning course resulted in her developing strategies to manage this challenge. In her drafting process she made a note of where theory or experience might be relevant, but concentrated on developing only one element at a time in her thoughts. One example of Patricia developing different strategies on each course was her preference to retain her drafts for the practice learning course as hand written notes until she had organised her ideas and content. On the foundation course assignments, however, she drafted directly onto her PC as this laborious process of separating '*guts*' from '*legal stuff*' was unnecessary.

Bernie also opted to separate theoretical and experiential writing in her practice learning course writing. Through her interview Bernie had made it clear that she did not think that there were differences in expectations of her writing between the foundation and practice learning courses:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Do you think that they wanted a different structure in this [the practice learning course], now looking back?</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>No, no not at all. I think what I did I got my ideas, that's how I did it. I got my ideas just poured out of myself and then structured it.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>And then structured it?</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>And did the academic side of it afterwards. I just separated the two, without thinking about it I just did it.</i> |

B6: Bernie Interview: 18th June 2001

My use of the word 'structure' here was intended to refer very broadly to the way in which Bernie organised her writing, in the awareness that the foundation course laid down specific essayist requirements in relation to the use of an introduction, main paragraphs containing the argument and a summarising conclusion. In this extract Bernie appears to suggest that she did not believe a different structure was required for her practice learning course writing. She describes a process whereby she allowed her ideas to be 'just poured out of myself' before she overlaid them with the 'academic side'. As with Patricia's drafting process, Bernie needed to 'pour' her thoughts onto paper and only after she had done this was she able to think about organising her answer. The two parts of Bernie's work also show differences in both the frequency of references to authoritative sources made and also the use of first person singular pronouns (which I discuss below in 6.5). As with her peers, Bernie makes more extensive use of references to authoritative sources in the second more theoretical part of her assignment. There are, in fact, no references to published sources at all in the first part of Bernie's text. This evidence of Bernie's decision (conscious or unconscious) to separate her theoretical and experiential writing is only apparent in her texts, as she does not refer to this directly in her interviews.

6.3.2 Responses to tutor feedback

Patricia's decision to divide experiential from theoretical writing suggests that she was not aware of tutors' expectation that these elements should be integrated, or that she found it too difficult to achieve. This mis-match in expectations appears to arise from the apparently shared understanding of tutors not being conveyed in writing to students through the course guidance.

This may account in part for Patricia's frustration with her tutor's comments. In discussing her writing on the practice learning course, Patricia expressed frustration that she tried hard to respond to her tutor's feedback by 'making a link' between the course materials and her experiences, but still received a comment encouraging her to '*say a little more*' about her personal experiences:

*Patricia: The one thing he said to me when I did ring him up was that you need to make a link, I told him what I was thinking about, and I said I want to use this. And this is the experience and he said that sounds fine but you must make a clear link and I thought I'll make a bloody link if it kills me and I did and he has written '**a clear link Patricia**' you know '**It would be worth saying a little more about how you see these issues now, has privacy become more important for you?**' And I'm thinking, well I don't know that you want to know that.*

P9: Patricia Interview : 14th June 2001 [my emphasis]

Patricia suggests here that even when she tries to adapt her writing to what she thinks is her the practice learning course tutor's advice, she still experiences his feedback on her writing as critical and is disappointed. Here she was advised to make a 'clear link' between her experiences and the theory presented in the course; he was possibly encouraging her to attempt more integration. Feedback on her text praises her for making a link, but then suggest that she should say 'a little more' about the link between her reading on issues of privacy and her own experience. In the absence of clear written expectations of her writing on the practice learning course (see chapter 5) Patricia seems to suggests that she needed to guess or anticipate what her tutor will want from her in each piece she writes. The issue of the impact of engaging in such personal writing is explored further in chapter 7.

Bernie experiences similar frustration with her tutor's feedback, in particular in relation to her tutor's criticism of her ability to 'structure' her work. There is in fact little evidence of such criticism of her writing, although feedback on Bernie's text does suggest that it would be improved by closer links being made to the course materials:

*I think that most (if not all) the 6 values are contained in this section – have another look and see if you can find them. For e.g. values 1; self-reflection, is in *¹¹can you identify points to tie in the others?*

Tutor comment on Bernie's practice learning assignment 2

The only written comment relating to structure, however, is a positive one:

I felt that this essay is a step on from [the first] in many ways. For starters, it's clearer and flows in a structured way...

Bernie practice-learning course assignment 2 feedback comment

In addition to these comments there are extensive positive remarks including:

...a strong essay that covered the relevant ground in a careful and detailed way...it is clear that you worked hard on this essay

B7: Bernie practice-learning course assignment 2 feedback comment

Despite these comments, Bernie interprets her tutor's feedback as significant and unwarranted criticism. As with Patricia, Bernie perceived her grade (of 60% / 2:2) as an implication of failure but struggled to understand from her tutor's feedback where her weakness was. She focuses at various times in

¹¹ The mark * relates to a cross-reference made by the tutor to illustrate a particular point marked in the student's text.

her interview on advice from her tutor that she should include more references, and interpreted a comment on her spelling and grammar as a criticism of her structure. The tutor comments on three language errors: he amended 'discrimination' to 'discriminatory', 'By just bring up the matter' to 'Just bringing up the matter' and 'if feels' to 'if they feel'. In his summary comments, Bernie's tutor makes a general statement in relation to spelling and grammar:

Keep an eye on grammar/spelling – only occasionally does this become an issue, and a quick double check will help smooth the spelling and grammar bits I have corrected.

B8: Bernie practice-learning course assignment 2 feedback comment

It is unclear whether Bernie interpreted this particular comment as a criticism of her use of 'structure', but she appeared to feel that some aspect of her writing was being unjustly criticised due to her ethnicity (this is discussed further in 7.3.2).

Bernie's prior experiences of writing and responding to feedback (on a previous degree and on the foundation course the previous year) were significant to her writing on the practice learning course:

Bernie: *You see I have come a long way because when I was at University. I would never read the teachers' comments because they would put me down and I didn't like it. I mean you think any comment is going to put you down.*

Lucy: *Hmmm*

Bernie: *And it was not like that on the foundation course. I took everything to the book, I went to all the classes, everything to the book, all the ideas that they gave you I took on board and when someone advises you to read the comments because it will help you, I did it to the letter, I did it.*

Lucy: *Hmm*

Bernie: *And when that lady gave advice I took it.*

Lucy: Hmm

Bernie: She gave me some good advice and I moved on.

B9: Bernie Interview: 18th June 2001

This extract from Bernie's first interview with me illustrates the confidence that her foundation course tutor was able to build in her, and the enduring influence of the lessons she learnt. Bernie's ability to take advice from her tutors changed the way in which she wrote her assignments both on the foundation course and on subsequent courses:

Bernie: She [Bernie's foundation course tutor] made it quite clear how [to write the foundation course essays] I followed her instructions she helped me improve and then moved on but I always make sure that my work is clear.

B10: Bernie Interview: 18th June 2001

Consequently she was confused and angry when she received what she perceived as critical comments from her practice learning course tutor. This was compounded by the fact that Bernie saw the practice learning course as an opportunity to use her ability to reflect:

I'm a very good person at reflecting, I reflect and move on

B11: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Bernie understood that the practice learning course involved reflection and she relished the opportunity to write reflectively:

Bernie: I always know that for a person you need to reflect on where you are coming from and what you are doing all the time and whether it is right or wrong- and I need to do that as part of religion and faith, I have to do that all the time and I am always reading self-help books. So when I picked up this course I said yes [with emphasis]! I really wanted... but it never really helped me.

B12: Bernie Interview: 18th June 2001

Recognising that the practice learning course provided an opportunity to reflect did not, however, signal to Bernie that the course would have different conventions in relation to student writing.

6.3.3 ‘I found I was going from past to present quite a lot.’

Pamela appeared clear about her tutor’s expectations that she should write about her own experience but expressed anxiety about her ability to meet the writing demands of the practice learning course. This was partly due to her reluctance to write about herself and partly because she found that the practice learning course involved the use of more complex language, particularly in her use of tenses:

Pamela: I feel that the style of the writing [on the practice learning course] is completely different as well, in what tense you write in and things like that there are things like that I found difficult, like I found I was going from past to present quite a lot.

PM3: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

This issue of Pamela’s use of tenses on the practice learning course is discussed above in 5.6.4. What is relevant here is that Pamela’s belief that the basic literacy demands of the practice learning course were greater increased her level of anxiety about producing texts on this course.

6.3.4 ‘I think that basically it is the requirement to put the ‘I’ centre stage.’

David differs from the other students in this study in that he is very confident in his academic writing skills and ability to adapt his writing to different requirements. He shares with Pamela a reluctance to talk about himself, however, and this together with his initial principled objections to assessed

reflective writing results in David also being challenged by writing on the practice learning course. David demonstrates a clear understanding of the expectations of his writing on both courses, the foundation course having been familiar based on his first degree and the practice learning course based upon his understanding of the written guidance:

David: I think that basically it is the requirement to put the 'I' centre stage in the practice learning course. I find it a little irritating and I have to be honest I feel that it is sufficient to demonstrate your understanding.

D4: David interview : 5th July 2001

Unlike Patricia and Bernie, David recognised the different expectations of writing across the foundation and practice-learning courses from the start, but he gleaned this not from the written guidance but based upon a brief comment by his tutor:

David: I knew what the formula was before the first one [assignment]
Lucy: Where do you think that you got that from? From the essay title, or from what [practice learning tutor] said?
David: I think the key phrase, I can't remember where it came from, I think it was probably one of [practice learning tutor's] phrases when he said you will be using the phrase the I, the I is what you will be writing. Now probably in all the other essays I have ever written in my entire life I have never written, I believe, I think, you know? at all.
Lucy: The clue that you should use the first person in fact gave you a lot more information about the formula?
David: That's right yeah.
Lucy: You deduced from that?
David: I understood what was required. And I said to [practice learning tutor] when I handed my first essay in you're not going to like this [laughs]

D5: David interview : 5th July 2001

This quotation illustrates both David's confidence in understanding the expectation of this switch in the way that he writes, but also hints at his resistance to complying, in that he is aware that his tutor will not be pleased

with his first assignment. This resistance seems to stem from a number of factors for David. He found it difficult to accept that the reflective writing was a valid scholarly exercise requiring genuine academic rigour when it directly contradicted his prior educational experience:

David: On the practice learning course the challenge has not been the writing, it has been not writing an academic essay. Because I thought that, I suppose, an academic essay was required rather than I think what appears to have been required, is ... what I wrote is a slightly less academic essay. [laughs]

D6: David interview :5th July 2001

David is clear that the use of the first person as a central requirement differentiates reflective writing significantly from other academic writing he has undertaken in higher education. He also signals here a perception that the differences in the practice learning course (such as the centrality of writing about the author's own experience in the first person) makes the writing 'less academic'. In doing so David is making a statement about what he personally understands to be 'academic writing' and that in his opinion the practice learning course breaks too many conventions to count as truly 'academic'.

6.3.5 Summary of student experience in managing tensions

This section has illustrated the diverse reactions of the four case study students to managing the tensions between the foundation and practice learning courses. David fully understood the implications of writing reflectively on the practice learning course, but was resistant to complying due to principled objections. Pamela was reluctant, though willing, to try and write experientially, but found this difficult. Patricia was willing, but did not realise that experiential writing was permitted, and then felt she had lost the

opportunity to gain higher grades. Bernie, despite recognising the need for reflective content, did not believe this involved any adaptation from the way in which she wrote on the foundation course. In the following section I move on to explore the impact on each student of attempting to meet the requirement to write experientially.

6.4 Experiential writing: the impact of writing about personal experience and values

Writing about personal experience was an issue for all of the students interviewed in this study. Bernie and Patricia relished the idea of writing reflectively about their experiences. Pamela and David, who had a clearer understanding of the different nature of experiential writing were reluctant or found it difficult to write about themselves. As discussed in the previous section, these four students also varied in the degree to which they appreciated the need to adapt their writing in order to include experiential writing.

6.4.1 Patricia

Patricia's feedback on her writing for the practice learning course led her to believe that, despite having shared very intimate experiences and reflected on values which placed her in an emotionally vulnerable position, she had not met her tutor's expectations. In the following extended extract from Patricia's writing, she reflects on working with a dying woman and the consequent impact of this work on her own thoughts about death and bereavement:

I have worked in partnership with Ann to gain her trust and to advocate on her behalf as she has tried to assimilate so much distressing information and navigate her way through unfathomable depths of loss – loss of independence, of dignity, of credibility and ultimately of life itself. I reflect that the strength of my support for Ann is largely a result of the empathy I feel for her as she attempts to protect her values from being compromised. The positive identity, with which Ann was admitted to hospital, is being systematically undermined by the inference that she is unreasonable, unrealistic and difficult, basically because she has refused to conform. Individuals “who are perceived as ‘difficult’ appear to find it hard to take advantage of the opportunities for choice” (K100 Block 3 p.43). In this instance Ann is both being labelled, and being discouraged from making an informed choice about where she feels her future care needs should be met.

good me
9.00
march

P10: Patricia practice learning course assignment 2 [‘Ann’ is not the service user’s real name]

- I even after her death. There have also been questions raised about Ann's competency in decision-making given the progressive nature of her illness. These are all issues with which I identify and I have during the past six weeks taken significant steps to protect both my personal privacy and my family should I ever be diagnosed with a life limiting illness or meet an untimely death. I have made a will, identified potential guardians for my children, shared with a close friend the location of private documentation, identified a responsible person who is prepared to have Power of Attorney should it ever be necessary and I have disposed of anything incriminating! I feel that my involvement with Ann has given me a focus in terms of my own values.
- 10 To help Ann to resolve some of the internal struggles she has faced in respect of her impending death, it has been necessary for me to explore some of my own anxieties in terms of my own morbidity. ✓ a clear link [redacted]. It would be worth

ie. you have shared info much more

Part Two

aying a little more about how you see this issues now? Has privacy become more important - seems so, and worth looking @ what this meant before the can happen?

P11: Patricia practice learning course assignment 2

These extracts illustrate the way in which Patricia shares her feelings about working with a terminally ill woman preparing for her own death, a painful

process which is compounded by institutional practices which deny her privacy and individuality. Through considering Ann's loss of identity, Patricia is confronted by not only her own identity but her own death. This experience motivates her to take action in her own life to prepare for any unexpected incapacity. This extract therefore involves Patricia in sharing deeply emotive personal information about herself. Despite this intimate disclosure, Patricia is encouraged by her tutor to provide even more reflection on her thoughts and feelings about her death both prior and subsequent to this experience, leading Patricia to understand that she had underestimated the depth and intimacy of the experiences expected of her by her tutor. Her tutor's comments are both on the text (*'It would be worth saying a little more about how you see these issues now? Has privacy become more important? Seems so, and worth looking at what this meant before the case happened'*) and reinforced in the summary comments, underlined here:

'I think it is worth reflecting upon the way in which this case helped you to effectively step into the service users' shoes in some ways – not completely of course, but share worries about the future, plans to be completed etc clearly struck a chord with you and perhaps you are looking about how you have developed as way of coping with fears that we all have to some degree in a more conscious way. Remember that looking at change implies saying where you were before the situation arose – that would be useful to comment upon in the future in relation to writing about personal development.'

Patricia the practice learning course assignment 2 text summary comments.
[my emphasis]

Whilst recognising the value of Patricia's writing about her experiences in this text, her tutor is also encouraging her to evaluate the impact that this sensitive experience had upon her 'personal development'. The use of the word

'personal' is significant here. The curriculum for the DipSW certainly encourages students to develop the ability to reflect upon 'professional development', but here the tutor takes the expectation of sharing experiences a step further to encompass the 'personal', a step beyond Patricia's expectation. It also appears that Patricia's tutor is asking for further reflection on her own values and personal responses to a professional experience. The specific issue he appears to want 'more' on is the way in which Patricia's values and behaviour have changed over time in response to a specific incident, in other words evidence of her ability to reflect and then change her practice. This example is indicative of not only the depth and extent that students are expected to share personal experiences in practice learning course assignments, but also the way that personal change (relating to beliefs and actions) is expected. This marks a significant departure from the target of 'objective' writing required on the foundation course where personal change does not figure at all. It also raises issues about students' emotional responses to writing and receiving feedback on experiential writing which will be discussed in more detail in 7.2.2.

6.4.2 Bernie

Bernie expresses strong feelings about her tutor's perceived failure to value the way in which she has written about her personal experiences in her practice learning text. As stated above, Bernie perceives herself as someone who is able to reflect well and sees this skill as an integral part of her identity. It is a strength which she feels she has and which others need to learn. She also elects to write openly about an experience of witnessing racism in a team to which she belonged. The following extract from her writing illustrates

Bernie's use of experiential writing and her ability to integrate it with theoretical writing:

The impact of this was of major significance to me because it affects my personal life as well as my professional life on a daily basis. Coming from an ethnic minority background it is an issue I have to face every day. The situation therefore has an impact on the rest of the community in which we work. Therefore the type of example we set to the rest of society.

I feel V is right and any form of oppression should be challenged. The gentleman who requested that he did not want a black service user should have been challenged and asked why not. Any form of racial oppression should not be condoned and there should be a uniform answer on the matter.

I therefore agree with Burke & Harrison who argue that as practitioners we need to practice beyond agency policy and practice and make a difference, by investing time and energy always analysing situations and thinking through the actions that needs to be taken (Burke & Harrison, 1998, p238).

Extract from Bernie's 2nd practice learning course assignment

This extract demonstrates Bernie's integration of experiential and theoretical writing. She moves from narrating her own experience, to offering her thoughts and feelings about this experience, to making a link with an authoritative source which she sees as supporting her view. Although this integration demonstrates her compliance with the assignment instructions, Bernie suggests that her tutor criticises her reflections:

Bernie: I think he was looking at it in academic terms and I think he was looking at it... I think he was forgetting that where you were supposed to be coming from for a practice and value side rather than thinking book [tapping the desk with her pen]. Like he was thinking this isn't in there and that isn't in there. But realised that I am in there and that it the true me, and there's nothing wrong with that person.

B13: Bernie interview : 18th June 2001

There is no written evidence on the text, however, that Bernie's tutor was critical of her writing about personal experience, which he described as 'powerful' and 'relevant'. Despite this she suggests that her tutor was unable to recognise and understand her as an individual. Based upon the text and interview alone is it difficult to find evidence to substantiate Bernie's feelings about her tutor's lack of empathy; she is clear however that she believed the fact that he was a white man was significant in her perception of his ability to understand her writing:

Bernie: I think he was taken aback when he read it. I felt it made him think. Because I think anybody would stop and see another perspective on how Black people think and that we don't all think that you're all prejudiced, but we do think that you are sometimes... If it was a woman that was black.

Lucy: They would?

Bernie: They would have looked at it in a different way.

B14: Bernie interview : 18th June 2001

In this extract Bernie makes an important point about addressivity (Lillis, 2001); she feels that if she had been writing for a black woman they would have been able to appreciate and value her experiential writing in a way in which her tutor, as a white man, could not. This could have been one reason for Bernie's frustration with her practice learning course tutor, demonstrated by, for example, her belief that he unjustifiably criticised the way in which she structured her writing. Bernie went beyond suggesting that her white male tutor was not in a good position to fully empathise with her experiences described in writing, but also attributed his criticism of her writing (as she perceived it) as stemming from personal prejudice. Bernie's disappointment with the practice learning course was even greater than it might have been as

she had initially welcomed the anticipated opportunity to use her reflective skills through writing about her experiences.

6.4.3 Pamela

Pamela portrays herself as a person who lacks confidence in writing about herself; she finds it hard to believe that she has anything of interest to say and can become very anxious over her studies (see discussion in 7.4.1). Despite this, one of Pamela's first positive memories of writing in an academic context was when she wrote a reflective piece for her schoolteacher about her experience of being bullied about her weight. She had taken the opportunity presented to her by her schoolteacher to write about a very painful experience and the experience of writing and sharing the piece of writing has remained in her mind since childhood. Although Pamela does not provide sufficient information about this writing task to make a meaningful comparison with reflective writing on the practice learning course, this early experience does suggest that Pamela felt something when writing about herself which she did not feel about her other academic writing. From this I suggest that it would be reasonable to conclude that such reflective writing both stood out in Pamela's mind as different and that it had a powerfully emotive impact for her. Despite this early positive experience of writing personally, Pamela identified the reflective element of writing on the practice learning course as difficult:

Pamela: [The practice learning course compared with the foundation course] is all I think or I feel or I felt. It's [the practice learning course] all quite reflective writing; it's quite difficult to get my head around when I first started. But I think that's the main one, even though you have to back it all up by theory it's a lot of writing about yourself which I found extremely difficult at first, why I did this and why I did that and if you did this could it be better. And I found that, whereas [the foundation course] is quite academic, everything is there, you read the course and then you do your assignment

PM4: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

This extract exemplifies the experience of both tutors and students in this study. The foundation course is seen as more conventionally 'academic' (the foundation course is quite academic) but it is also perceived as having more explicit expectations and straightforward content (everything is there, you read the course and then you do your assignment). Pamela suggests that, although both courses require theory, the distinguishing feature of the practice learning course is a lot of writing about yourself. She also identifies the expectation (highlighted by the feedback on Patricia's text in 6.4.1) for evidence of personal change (why I did this and why I did that and if you did this could it be better). Pamela articulates in PM4 (see underlined text) the need for the student not only to reflect on an experience but also to write about how this reflection would alter their practice in the future, a process which could be described as a full reflective circle from experience, through reflection to revised practice.

Through the process of writing down difficult practice experiences, Pamela discovered that the strength of the emotive impact of the original event was reinforced.

Pamela: I think it's the process of not realising how much of an impact some of these things that have happened have actually had on you and on the [practice learning] course it's: well I do this because that did happened - in this assignment it was, I was treated urghh I can't believe, but it was nothing on the day but now I look back I'm like can't believe, I was uncomfortable I felt like a nobody really. Its like realising that, that had an influence on what I do today. I'm not very good at talking about me, I'm terrible at blowing my own trumpet. I get told at interviews that I've got to blow your own trumpet - and I'm not very good at it.

Lucy: If you had been talking rather than writing it would still have been difficult?

Pamela: Yeah yes

Lucy: Do you think the writing made any difference the fact that you were writing rather than talking about yourself?

Pamela: Yeah - I think I found it easier to write about it but it's still, I can't see why anyone is interested in me so that's how I feel, this is me but is it really interesting?

PM5: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

Pamela indicates in this extract that it was easier for her to write down and reflect upon such experiences than it would have been to have talked about them, a sentiment which was not shared by David (discussed below in 6.4.4). Through reflecting and writing about a painful memory with the illuminated hindsight of new learning, Pamela is able to empathise with her younger and less experienced self. However, despite this more confident perspective, she is still surprised that her writing is of any interest to others. At the end of this extract there is an indication of Pamela's low self-confidence again:

I can't see why anyone is interested in me, so that's how I feel this is me, but is it really interesting?

PM6: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

Pamela's belief that her writing should be 'interesting' to her reader is another example of students' concerns with addressivity (see above in 6.4.3). Pamela

also raises the questions of the perceived purpose of academic writing generally and reflective writing in particular. Pamela's comment seems to imply that, even if her writing is also about demonstrating academic and professional skills, she feels that it should maintain the interest of her tutor. Pamela's discussion of her writing again raises the significance of the emotional impact of reflective writing. This will be discussed further in 7.2.2.

6.4.4 David

David's reluctance to delve into a personal discussion of his values is illustrated as he moves into reflecting on practice scenarios. David elects to use hypothetical practice scenarios to test out his value position, rather than reflecting upon the impact that actual practice experiences had upon his values and beliefs. For example he draws upon the hypothetical scenarios of a fraud committed by a service user, inappropriate behaviour by a colleague and managing pressure at work to illustrate his values. This differs from Patricia and Bernie, who focus on both real practice experiences and their own values and beliefs more directly and could therefore be argued to consequently have taken great risks in their disclosures.

In my first interview with David he expresses some reticence about the necessity and justification for the practice learning course requirements to include discussion of personal experience (as opposed to demonstrating knowledge alone) in academic writing:

David: I suppose don't want to give too much of myself in an academic essay, largely because I think that its, this is going to sound even worse now. People can say ...

Lucy: Hmm

| | |
|--------|---|
| David: | <i>anything</i> |
| Lucy: | <i>Hmm</i> |
| David: | <i>You can write anything down and I could join in with that but values are demonstrable in action. I have got 17 - 18 years or whatever it is and <u>I am happy to talk about it if it is a two-way thing.</u></i> |
| Lucy: | <i>Hmm</i> |
| David: | <i>And I know this is a slightly false environment, but say in supervision your practice teacher says...I'm quite happy to talk about it.</i> |
| Lucy: | <i>Hmm</i> |
| David: | <i>Because there is a chance to nail misconceptions or explain things in perhaps more detail or just give a slightly softer personal point of view.</i> |
| Lucy: | <i>Hmm</i> |
| David: | <i>Demonstrating understanding, I don't think that there is room in your, what, 2000 words or whatever it was you can't do it properly.</i> |
| Lucy: | <i>Hmm</i> |
| David: | <i>Demonstrating understanding. I'm not going to try and explain myself in 2000 words.</i> |

D7: David interview : 5th July 2001 [my emphasis]

David acknowledges here that he feels personally uncomfortable with sharing experiences in his writing. In the underlined section David provides another example of the particular significance of addressivity on the practice learning course (see 6.4.4 and 6.4.3). For David the personal nature of this writing makes the addressee significant and he suggests that the content is inappropriate for a written communication context, as opposed to face-to-face with his practice supervisor. He also questions whether writing about values and experience in this way is a valid method of assessment due to the risk of misconceptions arising from trying to 'explain myself in 2000 words'.

Here David expresses something both important and complex about the nature of writing about personal experience and the relationship with his reader. As an experienced practitioner David recognises the importance and

relevance of exploring personal reflection as part of his professional development. He objects, however, to doing so in the context of writing where his ability to express himself is limited both by a word count and by the lack of dialogue with his addressee; there is a need for such communication to be a 'two way thing' which he implies is lost in an exchange of academic writing. He also suggests that the authenticity of his reflections cannot be judged outside of his direct practice, something his tutor does not have access to. In this argument, therefore David is not only demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of what is required of his writing on the practice learning and a rationale for the relevance of reflective writing, but also a convincing case for assessed writing being an inappropriate context for such reflection to take place.

David's tutor encourages him to be more concrete in his discussion of values, basing them on real experiences rather than focusing on hypothetical scenarios:

It would have been really useful to pick up on an example in the advisor role where something came up that did challenge you...Framing things up in that way would have made your comments more concrete ...

David: Practice-learning course assignment 2

Although David's tutor awarded a pass 2:2 for this assignment, his comments suggest that he wanted David to talk more directly and openly about himself in asking David to write less hypothetically' and to 'personalise' his writing. This assessment of David's work implies that although David may have attempted to meet the requirements of the practice learning course, despite his evident skill, his writing remained substantially detached and depersonalised.

Despite David's reservations, his resistance to writing reflectively weakens slightly by his second assignment:

David: I am warming to the task slightly but I still feel that it is sufficient to be able to demonstrate understanding in writing and demonstrate values in action. That is how it should work.

D8: David interview: 25th July 2001

This resistance does not prevent David from attaining good passes in his practice learning assignments (his second assignment was awarded 70%) although (as with all students in this study) this was well below his grades in the foundation course which were consistently over 90%. David's self-assessment was that he was a reluctant player is illustrated by his comment that:

Had I let myself go and not been so just bolshie about it I probably would have enjoyed it even more.

D9: David interview: 5th July 2001

Here David's reflection on engaging in reflective writing suggests that his initial resistance weakened as the course progressed and that he had some regret that his initial response prevented him from enjoying this writing more. These reflections again suggest a significant emotional response to this particular kind of writing which was not evident in students' discussion of the foundation course.

6.4.5 Summary of the impact on students of writing about personal experience

Throughout this section all of the case studies illustrated the unusual nature of writing on the practice learning course and that, regardless of the degree of willingness or success in writing in this way, it raised issues for them which

did not exist on the foundation course. The requirement to write experientially, and in particular to write about personal beliefs and values, resulted in some specific issues being foregrounded, such as the relationship with and identity of the addressee and the students' response to feedback. There were also issues raised in relation to the students' writing practices, such as the ways in which they coped with trying to integrate experiential and theoretical writing, which posed a technical and psychological challenge for Bernie, Pamela and Patricia. In the following section, in order to understand one aspect of the technical implication of writing reflectively, I explore the use of first person singular pronouns on each of the courses studied.

6.5 Use of first person singular pronouns

Through my data analysis it became increasingly clear that one of the defining features of writing on the practice learning course was the explicit requirement for the author to locate their own experiences and reflections at the centre of their texts. This feature of writing was represented most obviously through the use of first person singular pronouns. This led me to question whether the ways in which the pronouns *I*, *me* and *my* were used could be quantified through the texts themselves. This would enable me to offer some evidence of the visibility of the self in student texts to support student and tutor views, as expressed through the interviews, that the practice learning course required authors to place themselves at the centre of the text. To undertake this analysis I drew upon Tang and John's (1999) research into pronoun use, as discussed in 4.11.4, in particular their categories of 'I as guide', 'I as a architect' and 'I as recounter of the research process'.

As outlined in 4.11.4 my initial analysis was based on all the practice learning course student texts and the second of the two foundation course texts collected. The practice learning course texts were analysed in two sections, labelled A and B. This was because all texts analysed were divided into two parts in line with the structure of the question (see 6.3.1). The question for the practice learning course is repeated here for reference. Part A relates to point 1 of the question and B to point 2; students appeared to understand to apply point 3 across both parts:

1. Describe how your previous practice experience has affected your personal values and the ways in which they have changed in response to that experience
2. Describe your current understanding of professional social work values and how you have arrived at this understanding. Outline those issues which you find problematic and want to work on during your present placement.
3. Illustrate your answer with examples from your previous and present practice.

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001, p. 10)

I undertook a count of the incidence of first person singular pronouns (*I, me and my*), and this count was repeated by a second person independently.

After comparing these counts, the results indicated the following findings:

Figure 25 Use of the first person singular pronouns (*I, me and my*) on the practice learning and foundation courses.

| Student | Practice learning course | | | Foundation course |
|---------|--------------------------|--------|-------|-------------------|
| | Part A | Part B | Total | Total |
| 1 | 57 | 46 | 103 | 7 |
| 3 | 48 | 46 | 91 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|---------------|----|----|-----|---------|
| 4 (Pamela) | 26 | 53 | 79 | 4 |
| 6 | 37 | 70 | 107 | 19 |
| 8 (David) | 61 | 11 | 72 | 3 |
| 9 | 80 | 48 | 128 | 1 |
| 11 | 41 | 43 | 84 | 2 |
| 13 (Patricia) | 46 | 47 | 93 | 2 |
| 14 | 68 | 30 | 98 | 5 |
| 16 (Bernie) | 36 | 33 | 69 | No data |

Note that students 2,5,7,10 and 12 were not included in this analysis as they did not study both courses during the period of data collection.

From this it can be seen that first person singular pronouns (*I, me, my*) appeared considerably more frequently on the practice learning course (69-128 usages) than on the foundation course (between 0 and 19 usages). In 6 out of the 10 data sets there was a greater use of first person singular pronouns in part A of the practice learning course than on B. This could possibly indicate that part A led students to write more experientially than part B due to the focus on recounting experience rather than demonstrating understanding (see underlining in the assignment questions above). Thus it could be argued that the use of first person singular pronouns increased where there was a greater requirement to write experientially.

Having identified that students uniformly used first person singular pronouns more extensively on the practice learning than the foundation course, I undertook my second analysis using three of Tang and John's categories ('I as guide through the essay', 'I as architect of the essay' and 'I as opinion holder') in addition to my categories of 'I as narrator' and 'I as reflector', outlined in 4.11.4. I introduced these positions as a result of finding that the

majority of incidences of first person singular pronoun in my student texts could not be accounted for by any of Tang and John's categories. I adopted Tang and John's approach of determining the role of the pronouns identified through determining the meaning at sentence level. As with Tang and John's research (Tang and John 1999 p. S37), determining the meaning at sentence level led to occasions where the role of the pronoun could be argued to align with more than one category. Generally however, analysis at sentence level provided a more satisfactory unit of meaning than working at the level of individual phrases.

My particular difficulty in applying Tang and John's taxonomy arose from a fundamental difference between the English Language essays used in their research and my own practice learning course texts. Tang and John's taxonomy associates authorial power with a particular text type, labelled as an essay, which is concerned with constructing argument based on primary research or research-based literature. They define the concept of authority as involving:

- 'a right to control or command others'
- 'knowledge or expertise in a particular field'
- 'the quality belonging to an author, where 'author' is used in Ivanič's (1995 p. 12) very specialised sense of 'a maker of meaning'.

Adapted from Tang and John, 1999, p. S26

The task of the author in practice learning course texts differs from Tang and John's texts in the centrality of the author and therefore also the nature of

authorial presence. In writing practice learning course texts, the author is expected, in addition to building an argument in relation to a body of research or disciplinary field (as might be required in an 'essay') to reflect on themselves and their own experiences. This involves the author looking both outwards towards a body of research or disciplinary field and inwards towards their personal experiences, values and self-reflection. The involvement of this inward focus necessarily involves an explicit subjectivity (or personal view in relation to the text) which is not normally associated with academic texts. Such subjectivity involves a kind of originality which could be described as authority, although perhaps not in the form anticipated by Tang and John.

Given these differences between the text types used by Tang and John and in my own study, it is not surprising that the same taxonomy did not fit comfortably with my data or written texts. For example I found no examples of the use of first person singular pronouns in my sample of texts which could be attributed to the positions of 'I as recounter of the research process' as neither course text in my study involved students participating in or recounting primary research. I also found no examples of 'I as the representative' (usually used in the plural to represent a notional group of people), or 'I as originator'. Of these the most complex distinction was posed by 'I as originator', whereby the author constructs ideas or concepts as 'new' and claims authority for them. As suggested above in this section, it could be claimed that through writing subjectively about themselves, student writers on the practice learning course are inevitably offering concepts which are original because they are based on unique experience. I would argue however, that the uniqueness of the experience on which the students' writing is based does

not necessarily mean that the author is making authoritative claims and that the subjective nature of the practice learning texts could be seen to preclude such claims.

Setting aside these three positions of 'I as the representative', 'I as recounter of the research process' and 'I as originator' I was left with 'I as guide through the essay', 'I as architect of the essay' and 'I as opinion holder', all positions which I found could be applied to my set of texts. My additional categories of 'I as narrator' and 'I as reflector' arose from my analysis of the texts where the reflective writing of the practice learning course involved students in two particular aspects of writing about experience:

Aspect 1: Students provide narrative accounts of their own experiences, both personal and in the context of professional practice.

Aspect 2: Students provide reflective analysis of their experiences, linked to relevant discussion of theory or other authoritative sources.

Thus experience is not only narrated but becomes a central object of reflection, rather than the students' (professional) experience being used as supporting evidence, as is the case on the foundation course. I have drawn on an extract from Patricia's texts to illustrate the use of first person singular pronouns which did not sit easily within any of the positions offered by Tang and John (1999).

I have worked in partnership with Ann to gain her trust and to advocate on her behalf as she has tried to assimilate so much distressing information and navigate her way through unfathomable depths of loss – loss of independence, of dignity, of credibility and ultimately of life itself. I reflect that the strength of my support for Ann is largely a result of the empathy I feel for her as she attempts to protect her values from being compromised. The positive identity, with which Ann was admitted to hospital, is being systematically undermined by the inference that she is unreasonable, unrealistic and difficult, basically because she has refused to conform. Individuals “who are perceived as ‘difficult’ appear to find it hard to take advantage of the opportunities for choice” (K100 Block 3 p.43). In this instance Ann is both being labelled, and being discouraged from making an informed choice about where she feels her future care needs should be met.

good me of our material

Patricia practice learning course assignment 2

Patricia uses aspect 1 of first person singular pronoun use (*I, me and my*) to *describe* her experience (*I have worked*). In addition, she uses aspect 2 to *reflect* upon those experiences (*I reflect that*), and also to express her feelings about her experience (*I feel for her*). In this example the positions of narrator and reflector are clearly distinguished from each other. This was not the case in many other examples, where reflection and narration were closely integrated. The following example (taken from an extract of David’s practice learning course text presented in full below):

What were the values **I** had when **I** started work 19 years ago? **I** believe, reflecting on them now that they were fundamentally the same core values that **I** hold now.

Practice learning course assignment 2, David [my emphasis]

In this example David uses the first person singular pronoun ‘I’ 4 times, but taking this sentence as a whole, it is not easy to distinguish specifically where he is narrating and where he is reflecting. However, the whole sentence offers

a good example of 'I as narrator-reflector' and is typical of many similar examples of the way in which narrator and reflector cannot easily be untangled, where their meaning is determined at sentence or even at paragraph level. Such entanglement did not appear to arise with the other positions, perhaps because the pronouns fitting the other positions identified in my texts samples frequently appeared alone within a sentence or paragraph, unlike the pronouns associated with 'I as narrator-reflector', for example:

Within this essay, I am going to explore the issues around identity, and why it is important, particularly for people who live in residential care, and how the residential staff help the individual to maintain this.

Foundation course assignment 4, Pamela [my emphasis]

Here Pamela uses 'I as architect' in the introduction to her Foundation course essay, 'I' appears as a single pronoun within this introductory sentence.

Further examples of the entanglement involved in 'I as narrator-reflector' can be seen from the following extracts from practice learning course texts written by students 1 and 10:

One family in particular that I worked with, made me question my values and how I impose these on others.

Practice learning course assignment 2, Student 1 [my emphasis]

The service is totally different as at present I am the purchaser of services and not the provider. This to me has opened my eyes to a whole range of experiences as when I started my placement I felt de-skilled.

Practice learning course assignment 10, Student 1 [my emphasis]

In both these examples, as with David's text, the narrator and reflector positions are effectively inseparable at the level of individual pronouns and therefore I have focused on the meanings that seem to be operating at sentence level. In the text written by student 1, her first pronoun could be identified as narrator ('One family in particular that **I** worked with') but the following phrase in which *me*, *I* and *my* appear includes both narrator and reflector. The same could be argued for the text from student 10. Again the first pronoun used could be identified as narrator ('The service is totally different as at present **I** am the purchaser of services and not the provider') but the remainder of the extract, containing *me*, *my* and *I*, involves both positions.

For the purposes of analysing my data, therefore, I have analysed incidences of 'I as narrator-reflector', counting all examples of first person singular pronouns (*I*, *me* and *my*) appearing in sections of text where the sense implies the narrator-reflector position, as in the examples above. In the position of 'narrator-reflector' the student is describing or recounting their experiences (narrator). Within the same texts, students are also using this experience as the focus for their reflections (reflector). Such reflection takes place in relation to links with theory but also their own personal values and beliefs. Thus the use of first person singular pronouns to narrate experience becomes the focus for reflections on associated theory or values and is associated with the expression of emotion. Using this revised taxonomy, I repeated my analysis, this time categorising the use of first person singular pronouns (*I*, *me* and *my*) into the following positions:

- 'I' as the guide through the essay
- 'I' as the architect of the essay
- 'I' as the opinion holder
- I as narrator-reflector

Given the difficulty in making a clear distinction between 'I as narrator' and 'I as reflector', I counted every individual pronoun which I categorised as narrator or reflector as one narrator-reflector pronoun. For example in the extract from student 10 (referred to above and repeated here) I counted 6 uses of 'I as reflector-narrator':

The service is totally different as at present I am the purchaser of services and not the provider. This to me has opened my eyes to a whole range of experiences as when I started my placement I felt de-skilled.

Practice learning course assignment 10, Student 1 [my emphasis]

Figure 26 illustrates the significance of the narrator-reflector position, particularly on the practice learning course. As in the previous analysis, students texts were only included where participants were undertaking both courses, with the exception of Bernie who is included here as student 16:

Figure 26 Count of pronouns categorised by category of 'I as Guide', 'I as Architect', 'I as Opinion holder' and 'I as Narrator-reflector'

| Student | Guide | | Architect | | Opinion holder | | Narrator-reflector | | Totals | |
|---------|-------|---|-----------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|---|--------|---|
| | PL | F | PL | F | PL | F | PL | F | PL | F |
| 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 101 | 0 | 103 | 7 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 82 | 0 | 91 | 0 |
| 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 77 | 0 | 79 | 4 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|-----|---------|-----|---------|
| 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 106 | 1 | 107 | 4 |
| 8 | 1 | 0 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 65 | 1 | 72 | 3 |
| 9 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 126 | 0 | 128 | 1 |
| 11 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 81 | 2 | 84 | 2 |
| 13 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 90 | 0 | 93 | 0 |
| 14 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 94 | 2 | 98 | 5 |
| 16 | 0 | No data | 7 | No data | 4 | No data | 58 | No data | 69 | No data |

4 – Pamela
8 – David
13 – Patricia
16 – Bernie

From this data, it appears that although there was no significant pattern in the appearance of Tang and John's categories across the two courses, narrator-reflector did appear significantly more often in practice learning course student texts and accounted for the majority of incidences of first person singular pronouns.

Drawing on Patricia's foundation course text (student 8 above) I have selected one of only two sentences in this text containing first person singular pronouns. Here she appears to restrict her use of first person singular pronouns to one very specific context where she marks an observation as 'experience' (*from my own experience I can see that*) and uses this experience as evidence to support her argument alongside the referenced quotation from Killick.

Exponents of Goffman's influential model suggest that institutionalisation erodes the core of identity and can result in residents experiencing a lack of privacy, personal choice and dignity. From my own experience I can see that, although residential/nursing homes may have changed in respect of their appearance, increases in allocated space per resident etc. little has
30 been done to improve the "long wastes of unstructured time" (Killick, chapter 15, p.131) spent by residents who continue to sit around the perimeters of residential home lounges, the television their only stimulation, waiting for death or tea whichever comes the quickest. ✓

Patricia the foundation course assignment 4

This very limited use of first person singular pronouns is different from the extensive personal reflections expected in the practice learning course texts.

In her practice learning text she links her experience with a number of references to theory such as the concept of empathy, positive identity, labelling and institutional treatment of 'difficult' patients. She also links her experience to the professional social work values of working in partnership, advocacy, promoting dignity and offering choices. This illustrates the very close relationship between the narrator and reflector dimensions, the author presenting the experience (narrator) and then using it as the basis for developing a reflective discussion (reflector). The following extract is from Patricia's practice learning course and illustrates the narrator-reflector position:

- 1 even after her death. There have also been questions raised about Ann's competency in decision-making given the progressive nature of her illness. These are all issues with which I identify and I have during the past six weeks taken significant steps to protect both my personal privacy and my family should I ever be diagnosed with a life limiting illness or meet an untimely death. I have made a will, identified potential guardians for my children, shared with a close friend the location of private documentation, identified a responsible person who is prepared to have Power of Attorney should it ever be necessary and I have disposed of anything incriminating! I feel that my involvement with Ann has given me a focus in terms of my own values.
- 10 To help Ann to resolve some of the internal struggles she has faced in respect of her impending death, it has been necessary for me to explore some of my own anxieties in terms of my own morbidity. ✓ a clear link ~~between~~. It would be worth saying a little more about how you see them ~~now~~ now? Has privacy become more important - seems so, and worth looking @ what this meant before the car happened?
- Part Two

Patricia the practice learning course assignment 2

Throughout this section of her assignment 'I as narrator-reflector' appears in Patricia's text (*I identify, I have...taken steps, should I ever be diagnosed, I have made a will, I have disposed of, I feel that*). Despite respective similarities between 'I as recounter of the research process' and 'narrator' and between 'I as opinion holder' and 'reflector', there is an important distinguishing factor. As the narrator-reflector position focuses on *personal experience* to narrate experience and then reflect upon experiences, it has the potential for a greater emotive involvement on the part of the author, as illustrated in the extract above from Patricia's practice learning course text. Here we can see the depth of emotion involved in Patricia's experience, for example her use of the phrase '*unfathomable loss*' marks a departure from more detached academic writing as she illustrates her empathy with Ann before moving on to make connections with the course materials and more theoretical references to identity and labelling theory, for which her tutor praises her. Patricia's use of first person singular pronouns, therefore,

appears to be both selective and closely linked to her perception of the level of intimacy involved in her writing. In the foundation course she broadly avoids first person singular pronouns. In the practice learning course she employs what I have termed the narrator-reflector position in order to meet the demands of more experiential writing.

The case study of Bernie did not include a foundation course text, but the following extract from the introduction to Bernie's practice learning course assignment shows Bernie's use of first person singular pronouns:

I In order to carryout the above assignment a summary of a previous practice experience will be given, showing how it has affected my personal values. I have also recognised that for the second part of this assignment I am able to continue using this practice experience to show my current understanding of professional social work values, which also shows how I have arrived at my understanding. Then finally I shall outline the issues I find problematic and want to work on during my present placement.

Bernie practice learning course assignment 2

This extract from Bernie's practice learning assignment contradicts her stated belief that, she does not use first person in singular pronouns in either course. However, it contains examples of both Tang and John's 'I opinion holder' and 'I as architect', illustrated here, as well as further examples of 'I as narrator-reflector'. Bernie begins with the passive voice (*a summary of a previous practice will be given*), then switches in the next sentences to 'I opinion holder' (*I have also recognised*) although it is an unconventional use, and moving finally to 'I as architect' in the last line (*I shall outline the issues I find*

problematic). Bernie's text primarily features examples of the narrator-reflector position, for example from the above extract:

| |
|---|
| <p><i>...I am able to continue</i></p> <p><i>...my current understanding</i></p> <p><i>...I have arrived at my understanding</i></p> <p><i>...the issues I find problematic</i></p> |
|---|

B16: Bernie practice learning course assignment 2

It could be suggested that the inconsistency between Bernie's belief that she had not used first person singular pronouns in her academic writing and her actual usage in the texts results from her attempts to re-draft her assignment into 'reflective writing', particularly in the first part where the assignment question is more experiential and less theoretical.

In Pamela's practice learning course text she describes past events whilst offering reflections on these experiences in the present or even in the future as she considers how her future practice will change. The complex movement in time may explain her perception that the practice learning course demanded a more complex use of tenses than the foundation course (as discussed in 5.6.4). The use of 'I as architect' appeared equally spread across not only each part of the practice learning course but also her foundation course. Pamela reserved the use of first person singular pronouns in her foundation course for the introduction and conclusion only. This marked difference suggests that, despite her apparent lack of confidence, Pamela seems clear about the differences between the ways in which she is expected to write on each of the courses and to follow this through in her writing.

Finally, where David used first person singular pronouns on his foundation course text, it was more often in the position of 'I as architect' through his text rather than to place himself as the 'narrator-reflector':

Without question Mr R has been "disabled" by the physical effects of his stroke, the environment in which he must now live has compounded those effects. It is an environment in large part designed and built by those whose motives are profit and/or utility. A unit of accommodation is built with a typical buyer or tenant in mind. Land is expensive so builders build upwards. If the population were substantially wheelchair bound and financially powerful then homes would be designed differently. As this is not the case, homes designed for the "standard" must be adapted. Or home builders otherwise encouraged to build homes more suitable for all needs. I will return to this issue later.

David foundation course assignment 2

In the above extract David is drawing on his own practice experience, which is permitted but not required in foundation course assignments. Despite this use of his experience, David only uses a first person singular pronoun in his last sentence (*I will return to this issue later*) and positions himself as, in Tang and John's taxonomy 'I as architect', (Tang and John 1999). David's practice learning course assignment, in contrast, contains a total of 72 uses of first person singular pronouns. Throughout David's practice learning assignment he positions himself as 'I as narrator-reflector' but avoids using 'I as architect', as illustrated in the extract below:

10 What were the values I had when I started work 19 years ago? I believe, reflecting on them now that they were fundamentally the same core values I hold now. Their seeds unique to me had been planted in early childhood by; my parents, wider family, teachers, friends and other influences such as the books I read and songs I listened to. 20 These values were specific to me and yet they represented a creation of the culture in which I had been socialised. Being white, middle class, having no particular religious or otherwise spiritual convictions, my parents were socialist, my mother feminist. My father who I idolised had argued with his own mother about her racist attitudes. I am the eldest of three, big brother to two sisters. I learned responsibility and accountability in a close family unit.

20 At University I was exposed to great cultural diversity. I lived with a Czechoslovakian dissident, a black South African, a Welshman and a Cockney. I was taught political philosophy by a blind tutor. My home was in a street of condemned houses. I knew I was nothing more than a cultural tourist however these experiences created the person I was becoming.

My values were intrinsic they informed my identity. They had matured and become more sophisticated as I had grown older and my experience of the world greater. At that time as now, my values would rarely be stated as such. They were represented by my actions. I was not aware of an approved values list nor did I at the time seek to codify the values I held.

Practice learning course assignment 2, David

Any guidance or signposting is restricted to part two of the assignment (where the emphasis switches from narration of experience to discussion) and remains in the third person, for example:

To expand on the latter point is to investigate the nature of one's understanding of social work values

(Practice Learning Course assignment guide, 2001, p. 10)

From this it could be argued that David was demonstrating his understanding of the difference required of his writing on the practice learning course and was using first person singular pronouns accordingly. Where he was not

required (or chose not to) to write experientially, he reverted to the use of the passive voice.

This analysis of the use of first person singular pronouns resulted in some consistent findings. These findings appear to back up the experience of students that the practice learning course required them to write in a very different way from the foundation course. All students used first person singular pronouns significantly less where they were not required to write experientially. Within the reflective writing of the practice learning course, those students who separated out experiential from theoretical writing made greater use of first person singular pronouns in the experiential sections. The theoretical sections, however, still contained a significantly higher incidence of first person singular pronouns than the foundation course texts. Drawing upon Tang and John's (1999) taxonomy, an analysis of the texts in the case studies also suggested that although texts featured 'I as guide', 'I as architect' and 'I as opinion holder', the most common use of first person singular pronouns did not fit into any of the six categories. This appeared particularly in texts containing experiential writing, and I have referred to it here as the 'narrator-reflector' category. These linked positions are distinctive, in that they relate to the author describing experiences, values or beliefs (narrator) and then reflecting on their thoughts and feelings about these experiences, values or beliefs. This experiential content, moreover, is treated as authoritative content by tutors and students, in the same way as a research or reading source might be.

6.6. Conclusion

Student texts on the practice learning and the foundation course are referred to at various times in the course guidance as being 'assignments' or 'essays' with no particular distinction between the two. Based upon data presented in this chapter, however, it appears that undertaking writing on the practice learning course generated issues for students which did not apply to the foundation course.

One central issue arose from the implicit nature of expectations of students' texts, expectations shared by tutors but only conveyed to students through written feedback or discussions in tutorials. The diversity of writing conventions, identified by researchers such as Lea and Street (2000), remind us that assumptions cannot be made that students or tutors who move across disciplinary areas (as well as between institutions) will share a common understanding of particular terms and the conventions that lie behind them. Within academic communities, the use of terms such as 'essay' suggest that they convey a common understanding of a text type against which students will be assessed, whereas in fact expectations are implicit and diverse. The requirements of different writing conventions differ but are frequently not made explicit to the student. Curry and Lillis suggest that::

Our implicit knowledge of what to expect from text types in response to certain prompts, such as 'discuss', 'critically evaluate', 'compare and contrast', informs the judgements that we make about the success of students' texts as a whole. The way we can generalise text types enables us as teachers to isolate certain traits and make them explicit to students, but we need to bear in mind that text types vary in response to the function that a text performs, which is not always reflected in the descriptive term applied to it. (Curry and Lillis, 2003, p. 21)

This suggests two levels of implicit understanding. Firstly, the label attached to the text type such as 'essay', 'reflective commentary' or even 'assignment' may all in fact refer to identical expectations, but equally could refer to very diverse text types. In the programme studied, terms such as 'essay' and 'assignment' were used interchangeably but did not communicate to students the differences required in particular texts. In this discussion I have illustrated the ways in which each of the students faced different challenges arising from the 'mysterious' practices and developed writing practices to manage them. Patricia slowed down her drafting process, making paper notes to enable her to separate out 'guts' from 'theory'. Bernie similarly needed to make a separation, but she did this 'without thinking about it'. Pamela's anxiety was heightened by what she perceived as greater technical demands on her writing posed by the practice learning course. This resulted in her drafting very quickly directly onto the computer so that she reduced the time she had to worry. David's writing practices focused on coming as close to the objectives of the practice learning assignment as he could without disclosing more personal information than he was comfortable with. All four students were challenged to some degree by the demands which arose from the requirement to integrate emotive and theoretical writing.

A second important issue arose from the personal nature of reflective writing, and in particular the experiential aspects in which students wrote about personal experiences, beliefs and values. The inclusion of this relatively unusual content in academic work raised several issues for students. Pamela and David spoke of their reticence or reluctance to include such personal information whilst Patricia and Bernie devised strategies to separate out

experiential and theoretical writing, as thinking about (and integrating) the two together was so difficult. The emotive content of experiential writing also appeared to sensitise the way in which students responded to feedback and also the significance of the identity of the addressee. An analysis of the use of first person singular pronouns further substantiated the very different nature of the practice learning texts, particularly where students wrote experientially. Not only were first person singular pronouns used significantly more frequently in the practice learning texts, but students used them in a very specific way which did not appear to conform to any of the categories suggested by Tang and John (1999). In order to talk about this usage, I have referred to it as 'I as narrator-reflector', a category used where the author of the text is describing experiences, values or beliefs and their thoughts and feelings about these experiences values or beliefs.

In the following chapter I focus in more closely on the individual student experience of writing about values and experience, drawing upon the discussion of writer identity outlined in chapter 4, in particular the additional contribution of a psychosocial approach.

7. Chapter seven: Developing a psychosocial perspective to writer identity

7.1 Introduction

In this final data chapter I draw upon the theorisation of writer identity presented in chapter 3 to explore the ways in which the identities of Patricia, Bernie, Pamela and David are played out through their writing. This chapter, therefore, is about the students as individuals and the ways in which their own identities and life experiences had an impact upon the ways in which they engaged with writing on the foundation and practice learning course. Each individual life story and identity is presented as having a relevance to the students' participation in their individual writing practices. Although the interviews are the primary source of data, where relevant additional sources are referred to such as the student texts and tutor comments.

Through the four case studies, I explore the usefulness of some concepts derived from psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives to established work on writer identity. The starting point for this exploration is a discussion of multiple identities and salience that provides an insight into the ways in which aspects of an individual's identity jostle for position, becoming influential on actions in particular circumstances. Reflective writing, produced for the practice learning course, generated particularly rich evidence for the importance of addressing emotion or affect, including the influence of defence mechanisms such as projection and subconscious or irrational behaviour, in

the context of student writing. The significance of the theory of projection is that the process enables the self to protect itself emotionally. This particular defence mechanism (a concept introduced in 3.8.4) diverts attention away from explanations located within the individual that are particularly painful. I will explore all of these issues in the context of the case studies with the intention of illustrating the contribution that a psychological and psychoanalytic perspective can make to our understanding of writer identity.

7.2 Patricia

7.2.1 Developing identities

In the following data, there is evidence of Patricia portraying herself as someone from a happy, settled family background. She describes her experiences of education as positive. She retains a confidence in her writing skills, both in terms of 'grammar' and her ability to write creatively. She also presents herself as a mature student who is a working mother who needs to juggle competing demands, an experience which has affected her confidence in her ability to study.

Patricia is in her mid 30s and was born and grew up in rural north Shropshire. Her parents both grew up on the borders of Shropshire and Cheshire and Patricia has retained her regional accent despite having lived in the West Midlands since the age of 18. Patricia portrays herself as having grown up in a very settled community. In commenting on encountering different cultures for the first time when she went away to university, Patricia describes her own family as being working class, living in a council house, as did most of their

friends. Patricia's father worked as a brick layer whilst her mother looked after the house and family. As a child she developed a love of writing and expected high achievement of herself. The only educational incident in her account which was not successful was when she failed to match the high examination grade she achieved in English Literature with that in English Language, an experience which bemused and disappointed her:

Patricia: When I did my O levels I got an A in English Literature and I failed English Language. Now I couldn't understand how I could have done that I re-took and got a B but the first time around I got an A in my literature and a fail in my language. My English teacher couldn't understand how you could have one skill and not the other.

Lucy: And nobody told you what the problem might be?

Patricia: No, not that time, and although it shocked me it wasn't something that I saw as a great disaster. I re-sat the exam in the November and got a B.

P11: Patricia interview: 15th March 2001

Patricia entered higher education as a young person who was exceeding her parents' academic expectations of her, as she was the only sibling as well as one of the few children from her class at school to move on to higher education. She left home directly from school confident in her writing skills, which had developed not only in school but also through her love of writing fictional stories:

Patricia: English was always my forte. I loved to write, I wrote children's stories but right from being a small child I have always written long, exciting, animated letters.

P12: Patricia interview: 15th March 2001

Her faith in her ability to write was not shaken at university where she again had a very positive experience:

Lucy: So it was a big culture shock coming to [city name]

Patricia: It was yeah

Lucy: What about the studies? Was it different from school in terms of...?

Patricia: And I found the first year easier than the last, you know the second year of A levels

Lucy: There were no great differences in terms of what you were expected to do?

Patricia: No, no not really and I did reasonably well.

P13: Patricia interview: 15th March

Based on her prior experiences of study, Patricia expected to be successful in her social work studies. She identified herself as having particular skills in using correct grammar, and talks of her irritation with grammatical errors in texts from the university:

Lucy: And have you ever had any negative feedback on your writing?

Patricia: No, never.

Lucy: So you must be doing it right?

Patricia: Yes, and I feel that I am. And I am very critical about, about grammar. I am I'm terrible about, especially if someone, even some of [the university] stuff and that, that shocks me I think when something comes out that is supposed to be from an educational institution and I do feel cross because I am so picky about my own writing. Somebody ought to have picked it up.

P14: Patricia interview: 15th March 2001

Patricia's self-identification as someone with literacy skills is further evidenced by her decision to act as volunteer helping adults to develop basic literacy skills. After completing her first degree in Social Administration, Patricia spent 15 years in employment working as an unqualified social worker prior to returning to higher education to study for her Diploma in Social Work.

Patricia describes herself as a mother and wife with family responsibilities; she is also a social worker with an identity both as a practitioner and as a trainee. Thus Patricia presents several identities through her interviews which

could be described as social roles: competent writer, working mother, experienced (unqualified) social worker, trainee social worker and student.

Patricia's identity was relevant to her writing practices in several ways. As suggested in chapter 3, my approach to identity involves more than a collection of current social roles. Drawing on Henriques et al., (1998) concept of the self, 'historical' aspects of Patricia's identity also remain with her and are influential on her current interactions. By 'historical' I am referring to the central concept in psychoanalysis that interpersonal interactions and experiences, particularly those of the infant, have a major influence on identity development. The consequence of this perspective is that current interactions can be influenced by the past as well as by current social and interpersonal contexts. Henriques et al. convey this concept within psychoanalysis as follows:

It [psychoanalysis] provides an account for the continuity of the subject, of the past implicated in the present (Henriques et al., 1998, p. 205)

This concept is important in my thesis as I suggest that this historical aspect of identity can only be located in the self rather than in social identities (see discussion above in section 3.8.2) as the self provides the continuity through changing social contexts. Patricia's writing practices, therefore, are also influenced by her emotional world, by irrational as well as rational thoughts and behaviour. Her emotional world, I suggest, is influenced by her social roles, and the inherent power dynamics arising from her subject positioning. It is also influenced, however, by desires and defences that are less visible and more difficult to explain.

7.2.2 Emotional worlds

To illustrate the significance and complexity of Patricia's emotional world I will explore her account of her feelings about returning to higher education.

Patricia talks about the anxiety she is experiencing in managing her studies on both courses after almost 15 years out of higher education. The competing pressures of her job and family generate new pressures:

Patricia: This, [practice learning course writing] I am finding it difficult to get my head around. I don't find it academically difficult, they are concepts and issues that I understand because I work with every day, you know, it's been here a long time now. I honestly don't know whether it was just that I lacked confidence but, if I hadn't sat down and been sort of coached and egged by colleagues, if it wasn't for the issues being familiar, I think I would have really struggled.

Lucy: What is it that you are finding difficult? If you think about the essay, you've had at least one essay back on both courses and has the feedback been good?

Patricia: Yes it's been very good.

Lucy: So you're not, it's not about the results? It's about your anxiety?

Patricia: About being able to cope.

Lucy: So what is it that's causing, is it the actual writing or is it the questions or collecting the material what is it that's stopping you?

Patricia: Once I find time to do it.

Lucy: Right...

Patricia: ...Is one issue.

Lucy: Hmmm.

Patricia: I've got two children. I just feel that there is some barrier that is that I'm finding it hard.

P15: Patricia interview: 15th March 2001

From this extract Patricia demonstrates her struggle to put her finger on why she is finding returning to study difficult and finds it hard to settle to her writing despite receiving endorsement through clear pass grades. In her reflections she acknowledges that confidence and finding study time in the midst of

competing demands are factors. She also identifies several reasons why returning to study should *not* be a challenge including the concepts being familiar, her belief in her literacy skills (which she prides herself on) and the concepts not being 'academically difficult'. These contradictory factors suggest that Patricia's apparent confidence in her writing is not as straightforward as it may appear.

Despite Patricia's apparent confidence as a writer and an experienced practitioner, she is finding the writing on the DipSW 'hard'. She refers to her roles as a mother as being a barrier. She may only be referring to the time pressures being a mother places on her studies, but her comment '*Is one issue*' implies that time is not the only factor and that Patricia is struggling to verbalise some further barrier. Her academic writing, particularly on the practice learning course, is confronting her with the requirement to draw together three aspects of her identity, the personal, the professional and the scholar which may not previously have been so closely interwoven.

This example illustrates that, for Patricia, there may be a need to compartmentalise her emotional responses within discrete sections of experiential writing. In this way she can close down or look away from her emotions when she focuses on aspects of her text that she interprets as not requiring experiential writing. This practice could be compared with the psychoanalytic process of 'splitting' (discussed in 3.8.4) through which an individual separates out bad or painful aspects of an experience from good or emotionally unproblematic aspects. By separating the emotionally charged experiences, where it is possible to do so, she is able to concentrate more

effectively on the less emotionally demanding theoretical aspects of her writing.

7.2.3 Identities and interpersonal interactions: Patricia and her tutors

In Patricia's discussion of her experiences of writing on the practice and foundation courses, she foregrounds the differences in her relationship with each tutor. She suggests that the differences in her respective relationships with her tutors arose for a number of reasons. Through discussing her feelings about her tutors, Patricia reveals conscious preferences about the ways in which she would like her tutors to interact with her, but also perhaps less conscious aspects of her own identity and feelings about writing which may also have arisen from the specific nature of the writing task on each course.

The practice learning course, as outlined in chapters 5 and 6, required students to engage in experiential as well as theoretical writing. In the context of seeking support to understand the requirements of the practice learning course, Patricia suggests that her difficulty with her tutor arose not so much from his physical unavailability in tutorials or on the phone but more to do with the lack of trust developed and the quality of the relationship:

Patricia: And yes you can ring him [practice learning tutor] up but to be able to do that you've got to feel that you've some sort of, how can I put it, sort of relationship based upon trust to be able to say that 'shit this is this' and you know 'der de der'...

P16: Patricia interview 1: 15th March 2001

Patricia implies here that she does not feel that she has such a '*relationship based upon trust*' with her practice learning tutor. The following extract illustrates one cause for her difficulty in trusting him:

Patricia: I did ring him [practice learning tutor] once before this essay and got quite a clipped response. That's all I needed to put me right off [Laughs]. You know, and I wouldn't ever go down that road again. I mean I have got a lot of pride and I think that I should be able to do this [complete her assignments] without asking and for me to actually ring up and say 'can you just, I don't quite know what to do with this' and well he wouldn't know that [laugh] it's just me being over-sensitive but I thought 'Oh! [slaps her hand] Right OK. So I wouldn't, unless I was absolutely desperate, ask for help. I'm sure it's just me, but it is the way I'm made.

P17: Patricia interview 2

This extract provides some insight into both the degree of Patricia's confusion about how to write on the practice learning course (discussed in 6.3.1) but also about her relationship with her tutor. Patricia suggests that it was the absence of a welcoming response (together with her own '*over sensitivity*') that deterred her from entering into a dialogue with her practice learning tutor in order to deepen her understanding of his comments and grading of her writing. The extract above also suggests that Patricia, as a person who prides herself on working independently and is sensitive to criticism or rejection, found it particularly difficult to trust her practice learning tutor. Moreover, he did not appear to recognise her need for individual time and encouragement, resulting in her feeling deterred from trying to seek help from him again:

Patricia: It's very difficult to have sort of special time for yourself with this course and I am very conscious that [practice learning tutor] is very busy,

P18: Patricia interview: 15th March 2001

Extract P17 and P18 provide some insights into the ways in which Patricia's own identity has a bearing upon both her relationship with her tutor and the

way in which she writes and responds to feedback. Patricia implies, from her use of a whisper and her comment: *I don't know I should be saying this* (Patricia interview: 15th March 2001) that she feels she is being disloyal and critical of practice learning tutor's competence. Her discomfort in criticising him reminds us of the imbalance of power between Patricia (as student) and her tutor.

It becomes easier to understand Patricia's difficulty in trusting her practice learning course tutor in the light of her reluctance to ask for help (*I wouldn't, unless I was absolutely desperate, ask for help*) and sensitivity to criticism (*I...got quite a clipped response. That's all I needed to put me right off*) both of which illustrate her vulnerabilities and need for support despite her apparent confidence in her writing skills. Although Patricia does not explicitly say so, it could be suggested that the personal nature of experiential writing meant that a trusting relationship between student and tutor was particularly important. Thus Patricia acknowledges that she was both particularly reluctant to ask for help and easily deterred if she did not receive a warm and nurturing response. She not only values but needs the '*personal bit*' in order to enable her to feel a sense of trust and enter into a dialogue with her tutor about her writing.

Patricia's difficulty in maintaining a dialogue with her practice learning tutor was not consistent with her experience of her foundation course tutor. Her relationship with the foundation course tutor was easier and more positive despite all her contact with him being through written correspondence or telephone conversations:

Lucy: *Have you ever felt able to contact [foundation course tutor], because you haven't met him at all have you?*

Patricia: *Oh I have yes!*

Lucy: *You have? So it isn't necessarily about building up a relationship in tutorials is it?*

Patricia: *No possibly not, 'cos he's, I mean when I first spoke to him I just said that I didn't think, you know, it was going to be very good having a tutor who was the other side of [city name] [laugh], and we would never meet, and he said 'Patricia don't fret', he said, you know, 'we will be fine and you can ring me anytime' and 'we can talk through your assignments'. And I have, and what we sort of developed was he writes on it and then I have a go with the areas that he has highlighted, if you like, and then I can put a little note on it, 'Dear [tutor]', you know, 'thank you for your comments blah blah blah I have tried hard to address increasing personal experience in the essay and I have made it more punchy and more concise I hope this better' and then back it comes, 'oh yes' you know, 'well done de der de der, and perhaps I need a bit of that'. I need a bit of 'come along come along' you know? And maybe that is something that I recognise in me that I, in the past, I didn't realise, but he clocked it straight away even though we have never met. But I imagine that he, he sounds like a chap in his I'd say, 50's? It's not as though we have any connection but when we first started with the foundation course he sent me a note saying drop me a line or email you know, I don't know you from Adam, who are you? And I did and I wrote him a piece saying you know I am 39, I've got 2 kids, you know, I do this I do that der de der and he replied and said, oh you know, 'you are a busy lady, how are you going to do this blah blah?' So things were set from the start off, but with the practice learning course there is no personal bit.*

P19: Patricia interview: 15th March 2001

Patricia's foundation course tutor appears to have recognised her need for not only encouragement but also for him to acknowledge her identity as a mother and mature learner who is juggling competing pressures. This, perhaps together with Patricia's response to his identity as 'a like a chap in his I'd say, 50's?' unlocked her ability to trust him, something which did not take place with her practice learning tutor. The fact that Patricia needed some encouragement and confidence building is something that she acknowledges that her foundation course tutor 'clocked' quickly. It is possible that one of the

factors that facilitated their interaction was his acknowledgement of Patricia's anxiety and her foundation course tutor's interest in her as an individual and empathy (*you are a busy lady*). Patricia's foundation course tutor, therefore, acknowledged central parts of her identity; Patricia as a busy, mature woman and mother. This aspect of her identity, as discussed above, may have felt disharmonious with her role as social worker and student. It was important for her, therefore to have these aspects of her identity validated as important and potentially conflictual issues, the recognition of which had an impact on her studies and facilitated her writing.

Identity markers for Patricia's foundation course tutor (*he sounds like a chap in his I'd say, 50's*) were as important as his interest in her identity, (*you sound like a busy lady*). Although Patricia broadly believed that she should be able to succeed (as writing is her '*forte*'), this was within the context of her confidence being shaken by returning to study and finding her studies more difficult than she expected. As a result, regardless of challenges of writing which may arise from issues such as clarity of academic expectations, the relationship between the identity of Patricia and her tutors became central to her experience of writing. Patricia's identification of her lack of trust in her practice learning tutor together with the failure of the practice learning course developers to offer adequate preparation, suggest that she is projecting the difficulties she experiences with her writing onto her tutor and the course developers. Similarly she projects her positive experience on the foundation course onto her tutor and his ability to help and empathise with her. Whilst Patricia's experiences may or may not match the perception of others (one tutor being empathic, one not, one course being clear and easy to write and

one not) what is significant here is the way in which Patricia responds to and rationalises (or makes sense of) these experiences, possibly through reference to particular discourses. One such discourse available to her would be that of 'good' communication skills within social work, in which the 'helper' should be available, nurturing, attentive, empathic and supportive with clear honest communication skills. In the context of this discourse, it could be suggested that her practice learning course tutor fell short of the ideal. Although there may be some parallels between the role of tutor and social worker, the reality was that Patricia's practice learning tutor was in an educational role and very different discourses may have been guiding his perception of his role.

Patricia does not suggest that her ability to write on each course is the result of the quality of her relationship with her tutors or even attributable to their tutoring. Her difficult feelings about her practice learning tutor clearly did, however, have an impact on how she responded to feedback on her writing and to seeking support. There is an interesting difference, for example, in where Patricia appears to look for guidance on each course:

Patricia: What we should have had, Lucy, to start with was some sort of workshop giving us an idea of the style [for the practice learning course], it's the style that is so different because D [the practice learning course tutor] wants 'I want, I think, I feel, I felt' whereas the, the foundation course is looking at writing in the third person, but D - well, you write that to your auntie Jane you don't write it for a course, I've never written it for a course.

P20: Patricia Interview: 14th June 2001

In this extract Patricia demonstrates that she looked towards the *course guidance* on the foundation course (*the foundation course is looking at writing in the third person*) but then personalises the source of advice on the practice

learning course to her tutor (*[practice learning tutor] wants I want I think I feel I felt*). This illustrates her awareness that the guidance on writing comes from both individual tutors and also course guidelines such as the assignment book. Her emphasis on each individual course, however, could suggest that she experiences the demands of the practice learning course as more driven by the tutor, and therefore (given her lack of trust in the tutor) possibly more arbitrary than the foundation course. Patricia also expresses frustration about the feedback she receives on her practice learning course (*And I'm thinking, well I don't know that you want to know that*) which she experiences as indicating that her tutor's expectations of her change from one assignment to the next, as discussed above in 5.6.2.

The reasons for Patricia's sensitivity could have many sources, including her anxiety about academic failure (resonating with her failure in her English Language examination as a child) and implied tutor criticism of the deeply personal and emotive discussion which she shared in her practice learning course text. Patricia's interactions with her tutors illustrate the salience for her of what could apparently be less salient roles. Her personal world became particularly salient for her when engaging in and receiving feedback on her academic writing. Despite the salience of Patricia's identity as a good writer as a young adult (*English was always my forte*) and familiarity with the course content derived from her professional life (*they are concepts and issues that I understand*), something shook her confidence as a mature student writer. It is possible that both the need for trust, and the difficulty of establishing it, could have been amplified by the emotive nature of the task on the practice learning

course in particular, but Patricia focuses more on the nature of the relationships with her tutors than on the demands of the respective courses.

Patricia shares some aspects of her emotional world which underlie these jostling identities: as a person who is reluctant to ask for help and feels she should be able to cope alone and a person who responds to empathy and a recognition of her as a busy mother as well as a professional and student. These multiple identities overshadow and influence the way in which she creates text (her writing practices) and also the ways in which she responds to feedback on her writing.

7.3 Bernie

Bernie's discussion of her experiences suggest that her identity as a black woman of Jamaican origin is associated with a number of discourses closely associated with personal historical experiences which carry significant emotional meaning for her. Bernie provided a detailed account of her prior educational experiences and her identity as a British-born woman with Jamaican parents. Like Patricia, Bernie described herself as a child as someone who was academically able, but unlike Patricia she did not feel that this was recognised by her school. She also said that she was hindered in her learning by the attitudes of her teachers, her cultural heritage and a lack of proactive support from her parents. Despite providing an account of repeated discrimination as well as linguistic and cultural disadvantage, Bernie showed remarkable resilience in maintaining her identity as a scholar. Her emotional world, as with Patricia, influenced her academic writing

7.3.1 Persistently salient identities

Although Bernie was born in England, she lived in Jamaica for just under two years prior to returning to the UK and joining a British primary school at the age of seven. As a young child she experienced both Jamaican and British culture and language, both through an extended visit to Jamaica and through her parents, whom she described as speaking Jamaican English, or Patwa, at home. In reflecting on her childhood educational experiences, Bernie identified some particular memories which she felt had an impact on her education. Some of these memories stemmed from the attitudes and actions of influential adults in her life and others from the cultural and linguistic context of her family. The first issue related to Bernie's memory of her own academic aspirations and the failure of both her parents and teachers to support and encourage her:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>I think I missed out because my parents believed that when you sent a child to school that the teachers would be fair, and they were not.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Yeah.</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>And I picked, I did pick that up as a child, I knew I was a very good athlete and I would not do it because it was not what I wanted to, I wanted to be academically able and I wanted it from a young age.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Right</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>And I believe that I would have been much, much better than I am now if that was picked up by my parents and just pushed in that area, that's what I wanted to do.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>So how do you feel that the teachers were unfair?</i> |
| <i>Bernie:</i> | <i>Oh they were unfair in that they did not push you in the areas that you wanted to, wanted to be they did not pick that up, they picked up that all black people were good at running, so therefore get out there on the field - I mean I missed out on classes because I was sent to, whenever there was a field race or sports day I could just go because ... um I could do, although I don't do it, they want me to go because they think just in case I change my mind - so I just sit there not doing anything.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>So teachers having stereotypes about what people were good</i> |

at?.....

Bernie: No I picked that up. I remember saying, I'm not doing, why should I do it? So I would not do it and I was not, I wasn't a naughty child, I was, if you look through all of my records always went to school and nobody ever had to take me home. I wanted to be academic, Yeah?

Lucy: But you didn't feel that they gave you the opportunity or pushed you or had high expectations for you?

Bernie: No, no - and that would have affected you as a child.

B17: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Whilst there is no way of determining the facts of the discrimination described by Bernie nor the extent of her parents' lack of support, particularly compared with other children, the important issue here is that Bernie experienced the actions and attitudes of her teachers and parents as being negative and unsupportive. The impact of this experience was sufficiently strong as to remain in her mind as an adult reflecting on her educational history and her current experience of academic writing. Despite the negative memories, Bernie was also aware that her parents had expectations of all their children going to university and that education was highly valued in the home, with books and encyclopaedias being available:

Bernie: And my parents had high hopes for us, they had expectations of us to go to university, I don't know how when they never pushed me.

[Laughter]

Bernie: They did anyway because um education was important to them.

Lucy: Sure

Bernie: And we all picked that up and it wasn't until later that I myself picked it up but nevertheless it was an important thing and um there was always like encyclopaedias around, books around to help and I remember that at one point my parents did have an English tutor for me.

B18: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Here Bernie identifies the contradiction in her parents' ambitions for her and attempts to support her and her childhood experience of them as parents who did not push her or respond to any failings of her school.

Bernie identified that part of the disadvantage she experienced resulted from the linguistic and cultural context in which she lived with her family. This may have contributed to her perception of her parents as being unsupportive. As an adult and parent reflecting on her childhood, Bernie recognises that the British education system assumed that children would have culturally based knowledge such as nursery rhymes, fairy tales and proverbs. As a child raised in a family where Jamaican English was spoken alongside British English, and with parents who did not move to the UK until they were adults, Bernie believed that she did not have sufficient familiarity with such culturally based knowledge to enable her to perform well in school:

Bernie: And so I thought that I missed out I thought looking back, just reflecting now, I missed out on a lot of culture, I was not in the culture as such because, if you understand phrases and nursery rhymes and things, you missed out on all that, so understanding when they give you different quizzes and stuff and tests to do you don't understand it because of the cultural difference you wouldn't understand the language and wouldn't know what they were talking about and what the phrases meant you wouldn't understand it ...

B19: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

And later in the interview:

Bernie: Because I recognised that [the importance of being familiar with English nursery rhymes] when my son, having my own child, that I, you needed to know nursery rhymes, 'cos you miss out if you don't know nursery rhymes and you don't know sayings 'cos I still don't understand a lot of the English sayings

Lucy: Yeah,

Bernie: 'Cos I say it the wrong way around I don't understand it, I will, you know, I will... like a bee in a bonnet or I'd say your bonnet in a bee, I

just did not understand why they were saying it and what it meant.

Lucy: Hmmm

Bernie: ... and that, or most of that, was in the 11 plus.

Lucy: Right

Bernie: Although there were other things I did not understand, so one way to help my child was getting to know, I learnt [with emphasis] all the nursery rhymes there was to learn, I learnt so that my son would know.

Lucy: Hmmm

Bernie: And he reads quite a wide range of books because I know that's important but I think I missed out because my parents believed that when you sent a child to school that the teachers would be fair and they were not.

B20: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Bernie suggests, therefore, that despite her parents' ambitions, they lacked (or believed they lacked) the resources to help their children educationally and believed that the school would provide all the necessary support. Any actual linguistic impact on Bernie's ability to succeed educationally is difficult to determine, although she does mention the following illustration:

Bernie: I didn't think that I had problems with my writing 'til adulthood. When I was at school I can remember one specific thing happening. That I put down... I was talking about a black girl who was fair in my story and I put down that this person was 'light skinned' and the teacher put down 'fair' and that made me stop and think... no, in fact there is another thing as well, my mum the way words that my mum used her English were more the American side because of the Jamaican using different phrases and stuff that would be more American than English.

Lucy: Right

Bernie: I started to think that because mum uses different words that was English and they weren't in the dictionary. And I thought I'm going to look in the dictionary for this word and the words that she was using were your words that probably more upper class would use.

Lucy: Uhu

Bernie: So I recognised that, yes, the words that my mother used were alright, it's just that the people I was mixing with at school the people that were teaching me, did not know these words and they were not wrong and they were alright to use. Like 'stop Kimboing' my mum would say, but it is in the dictionary and I did not know, until I thought

let me look up half of these words that she uses, um, so it in a sense affected me [with emphasis] without realising it until I was older, and I thought that my big problem was maths, and it wasn't maths and I went back into college and I studied again and maths was not my problem, it was English.

B21: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Alongside Bernie's discussion of the influence of her family and cultural background, she also focuses on the attitudes and actions of her teachers as a child. As with her initially negative comments about her parental support academically, Bernie's recollections are also mixed in relation to her teachers. Although she speaks of being mis-placed in remedial classes, for example, she also talks of this being quickly rectified and of particular teachers who recognised her abilities and encouraged her:

Bernie: And I think the teacher, the teacher can have an effect on you, and I think that one of my, one of the reasons that I quickly moved out of the bottom class was that a teacher, recognised my capabilities and even so she recognised that there was other qualities in me. I mean the one time I was ill, and she came to the house and, and I was like really shocked and she said 'you out of all the people I would know that there was really something wrong. But she really thought, you know she had hopes for me that ...she saw that potential, but...

Lucy: She was unusual?

Bernie: Yeah. So it's, I think, my maths teachers had a lot to do with it and when I went back into doing maths I, I'm a very good person at reflecting, I reflect and move on, and I met another maths teacher, that was a man, they are usually male [laugh] they um do their work, if you can't do it it's our problem and I happened to meet another one and this time I thought, well OK, I'll take note and I'll remember what I'm supposed to learn and I'll go out and I'll find out and that's exactly what I did. And I know that it's not me it's you, because you can't get me to know. And I went out and I found out, what ever you can do I can do, and that's my attitude now.

B22: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Apart from gender there is no indication on the part of her teachers of identity markers, such as heritage, but there is a suggestion that Bernie did not experience all of her teachers demonstrating discriminatory or racist attitudes

or behaviour towards her. Bernie's focus on racist experiences and her acknowledgement of gender is particularly interesting given her experiences of writing on the social work programme, as discussed in 6.4.2.

In the context of our discussions about her writing, Bernie focuses on several identities which appear to be particularly salient for her: Bernie as a Black Jamaican, Bernie as a reflective, religious woman and Bernie as a person who values education. Each of these identities carry with them an association with particular discourses, but they also carry particular emotional significance for Bernie. Taking the example of religion, Bernie suggests that her 'religion and faith' is the source of her ability to reflect and has been something she has done for a long time. For her, reflection is associated with a moral imperative:

Bernie: I always know that for a person you need to reflect on where you are coming from and what you are doing all the time and whether it is right or wrong, and I need to do that as part of religion and faith, I have to do that all the time and I am always reading self-help books. So when I picked up this course I said yes [with emphasis]! I really wanted... but it never really helped me.

B23: Bernie Interview: 18th June 2001

When she encounters reflection as part of experiential writing on the practice learning course, therefore, she associates it not only with something familiar that she can do, but with a central aspect of her identity which carries spiritual value. The close association between education and Bernie's identity as a black woman, based on her difficult childhood experiences, have unsurprisingly stayed with her and appear to be influential on the way in which she experiences her relationship with her tutors. Despite there being very little evidence of criticism of her writing from her practice learning tutor, she

expresses concern that he is making unjust racialised judgements on her writing. This example illustrates the importance of discourse and emotion because it offers Bernie an interpretation of her tutor's behaviour. She depicts her tutor's behaviour as matching her prior experience of education which she associates with a particular discourse of racist educational practice. Bernie describes her experiences of racism at school as a child (see extract B17) and links this to her belief that white teachers (by implication in higher education) focus disproportionately on black Caribbean students' writing when looking for and commenting on surface language errors (see extract B23 above in this section). This identity and subject positioning was subtly reinforced by a gender position only hinted at by Bernie when she suggests that, whilst it would be very difficult for a white man to understand black people's experiences, a black woman's ability to understand would be 'different'. In suggesting someone who would be able to understand her experiences in a different way, she aligns not only the ethnicity but also the gender with her own. This suggests that Bernie's identity as a woman as well as a black person (in contrast to her white male tutor) was influencing their relationship.

7.3.2 Repeating discourses

The above examples illustrate that Bernie's identity as a black English-born Jamaican was central to her very difficult prior educational experiences. These experiences involve emotive memories, but also her familiarity with particular discourses such as those relating to racism and education. These discourses and emotions remain with her as an adult and shadows of them can be seen in her discussion of her relationship with her practice learning

tutor. Bernie identifies difficult experiences with her tutor and recounts experiences which are racialised in her interpretations of them.

Bernie: And I did re-jiggle everything [the practice learning course assignment] and make sure I put everything together where it's supposed to be and stuff like that

Lucy: Hmmm

Bernie: And then put it down and then go back to it so I know [emphasis] that I have no problem with that, but he talked [emphasis] as if I had a problem with it and I was angry.

Lucy: Hmmm

Bernie: And I felt that it was coming from something else because there was a lot of other Black people said the same thing too.

B24: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

The methodology used in this research does not provide evidence to suggest that Bernie's competence resulting from her culturally based knowledge or linguistic skills themselves have influenced her academic writing. Equally there is no data to clearly support or contradict Bernie's impression that her practice learning tutor's comments or grading were racially influenced. Only two corrections of surface features are made on Bernie's text and the summary comment, although it refers to 'grammar / spelling' does not imply that these are either persistent or of significant concern:

Keep an eye on grammar/spelling – only occasionally does this become an issue, and a quick double check will help smooth the spelling and grammar bits I corrected.

Bernie foundation course assignment 4 tutor comment

The data does indicate, however, that one consequence of her prior experiences has been that Bernie's perceptions of her tutor's attitudes are a significant influence on her writing practice. It was important for her that there

was a level of mutual understanding, of shared experience at some level to enable her tutor to understand her writing:

Bernie: Sometimes when you understand where a person is coming from you can understand their writing

B25: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

There are several examples in Bernie's talk about her writing which illustrate the importance of this connection. This first example illustrates Bernie's response to feedback and the importance to her of receiving feedback on her writing practice that she trusted. Here Bernie talks about her initial reluctance to read and respond to feedback on her writing which resulted from her sensitivity to anticipated criticism:

Bernie: I, you see I have come a long way, because at University I would never read the teacher's comments because they would put me down and I didn't like it. Not put me down, I mean you think any comment is going to put you down. My son is a bit like that; I keep trying to get him out of it. You need to read the comments and move on.

Lucy: Hmmm

Bernie: And it was not until I started the foundation course I took everything to the book I went through all the classes, everything to the book, all the ideas that they gave you I took onboard and when someone advises you to read the comments because it will help [with emphasis] you, I did it to the letter, I did it [with emphasis].

Lucy: Hmm

Bernie: And when that lady gave advice I took it.

Lucy: Hmmm

Bernie: She gave good advice and I moved on

B26: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Bernie's hard-won confidence in the advice of this foundation course tutor made it all the more difficult for her to accept criticism or follow advice from subsequent tutors. This may in part explain her reluctance to follow guidance on writing for the practice learning course which contradicted the advice of her

trusted tutor. Bernie and Patricia also both expressed the unmet need (on the practice learning course) to feel trust and a personal connection with their tutors. The following extract provides a further example of Bernie's need to feel a connection with her tutor:

Bernie: I find as well that coming from studying for so long that you it's not about the work it's is about knowing who is marking it, marking your work

Lucy: Hmmm

Bernie: And I could not connect with this teacher at all so I didn't want to, it was a waste of time trying because I was never going to get there. I felt a sense that I was never going to get there, I was wasting my time so I gave up trying.

B27: Bernie interview: 20th March 2001

Here Bernie is clear that there was something about her tutor on the practice learning course that led her to the conclusion that she was 'wasting her time'. She indicates that she feels uneasy about his responses to her writing as a Black student:

Bernie: And I felt that it was coming from something else because there was a lot of other Black people said the same thing too.

B28: Bernie interview: 18th June 2001

Bernie makes more than one reference to her practice learning tutor's response to her as a Black woman and, although not stated explicitly, she implies that this is unhelpful. She certainly suggests that her practice learning tutor would not have the same ability to understand Bernie's writing discrimination as a Black person might have:

Bernie: I always wanted to write about my experience and where I come from and that essay was my first opportunity to do so and then this, this is what I get [laughter] But then I suppose it is an individual thing, not everybody is going to like what you have written and if you find one person to get it off the ground then loads of other people will like it.

| |
|---|
| <p><i>Lucy: Do you think that [practice learning tutor] didn't like what you had written?</i></p> <p><i>Bernie: I think he was taken aback when he read it. I felt it made him think. Because anybody reading that would stop and see another perspective on how Black people think and that we don't all think that you're all prejudiced. But we do think that you are sometimes.</i></p> |
|---|

B29: Bernie interview: 18th June 2001

This extract again illustrates Bernie's quiet confidence in her writing ability, externalising any difficulties by locating them in her readers. This is illustrated by her acceptance that '*not everybody is going to like what you have written*' and assertion that the practice learning tutor's reading of her work was racialised and potentially prejudiced.

Drawing on Henriques et al. (1998), the association of discourses based on inequality and discrimination creates a context for Bernie to interpret or understand her experiences of participating in academic writing. But closely associated with these ways of understanding are ways of feeling. Bernie expressed anger, frustration and a sense of injustice in relation to her writing, despite that fact that it was praised and received good marks. She projected any criticism of her writing (real or assumed) back on to her tutor and justified her tutor's actions in the context of discriminatory discourses. As with Patricia's defence mechanism of projection, Bernie's projection of 'getting it wrong' on to her tutor does not imply that in reality she was the one making mistakes, only that she was protecting herself emotionally from an anticipated failure or criticism that would be emotionally painful for her. Thus her projection protects her from criticism and is justified by discourses of discrimination and reinforced by her own historical experiences. Bernie's projection illustrates the way in which the relationship between identity and

current experience involve both conscious and unconscious, rational and irrational thought and behaviour. At times Bernie makes very clear and consciously intentional links to discourses of discrimination, but she also appears to enact this discourse less rationally, such as claiming that her tutor criticised her use of English because he mixed her up with another black female student. In fact Bernie acknowledges that this other student also has good written language skills, so her argument for her tutor's prejudicial assumptions appears irrational but may betray her unconscious pre-occupation with particular discourses.

7.4 Pamela

Pamela was the youngest member of the tutor group and had also had the shortest gap in her education, having followed a Higher National Diploma in Childcare between leaving school and beginning her Diploma in Social Work. In contrast to Bernie and Patricia, who talked freely about both their childhood and experiences of writing on the Diploma in Social Work, Pamela spoke less. Her reluctance to speak about herself provided an important context for her writing in itself, and appeared to be linked to the equally important theme of Pamela's self-confidence.

7.4.1 In the shadow of low self-confidence

In Pamela's first interview she acknowledged that she found it very hard to talk as well as to write about herself:

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|---|
| <i>Pamela: I'm not very good at talking about me. I'm terrible at blowing my own trumpet. I get told at interviews that I've got to blow your own trumpet, and I'm not very good at it.</i> |
|---|

| | |
|--------------|--|
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>If you had been talking rather than writing it would still have been difficult?</i> |
| <i>Pam:</i> | <i>Yeah, yes</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Do you think the writing made any difference the fact that you were writing rather than talking about yourself?</i> |
| <i>Pam:</i> | <i>Yeah - I think I found it easier to write about it but it's still - I can't see why anyone is interested in me so that's how I feel, this is me but is it really interesting?</i> |

PM7: Pamela interview: 12th April 2001

One of the issues raised here is that Pamela states that she finds it hard to understand why anyone might be interested in her and what she has to say and that this affected the way in which she approached writing, where this was a requirement, such as on the practice learning course. This suggestion of a lack of self-confidence was also apparent when Pamela spoke about her early school experiences, during which, despite a love of reading she felt that her handwriting was messy and she (along with her parents) did not have aspirations of higher education. Pamela left school at 16, having achieved grade D passes at GCSE in English language and literature and makes no comment that she expected or thought that she deserved or expected a higher grade.

Pamela did not share a great deal of information about her early educational experiences in the interviews. What does appear to be clear in her account, however, is that Pamela attributes her performance to her abilities alone, despite evidence presented elsewhere that there were good external reasons for all the students struggling with the expectations of their writing on the practice learning course (see chapter 5 and 6). In psychoanalytic terms, Pamela could be described as 'introjecting' any difficulties associated with her writing, or in other words absorbing external explanations for her difficulties

(or indeed achievements) rather than looking for explanations beyond herself. This is something she has in common with David (see below) but not with Bernie or Patricia, who both identify external influences on their ability to succeed in their writing. Pamela does not mention the influence of her parents or particular teachers in her journey to developing her literacy. The only specific teacher mentioned is one who rang her at home to talk to her after she wrote a reflective piece about her experiences of being bullied about being over-weight. She suggests that her performance in writing was affected by her negative feelings about her messy handwriting, although she does not recount receiving any negative comments about her handwriting from school.

Pamela did not pursue her studies beyond the age of 16 as, having lost about 5 stone when she was 13 or 14 she described herself as being distracted by a lively social life. She was led back into higher education following her decision to work in childcare, which required her to undertake a Higher National Diploma in Childcare. Pamela's discussion of her writing on the social work programme mirrors her reflection on her school experiences in that she primarily attributes any difficulties to herself rather than to the actions of others. For example, along with all the other students in the group, Pamela identifies the practice learning course as more difficult than the foundation course, but she attributes this difference to her own difficulties with the reflective writing rather than to the failure of either her tutor or the guidance to explain what was required:

Pamela: With the practice-learning course it's all I felt, I feel or I think, which is all quite reflective writing which I found it difficult to get my head around, when I first started, I think that that is the main one even though you have to back it up by theory it's a lot of stuff about

yourself which I found extremely difficult to do at first, why I did this and why you are supposed to do that.

PM8: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

Pamela's anxiety about her writing is also demonstrated by her lack of confidence in using tenses in her assignments. She identifies that greater skill is needed in the use of tenses when writing on the practice learning course (discussed in chapter 6) which she found particularly challenging:

Pamela: I feel the style of the writing is completely different as well, in what tense you write. But the thing that I found in the practice learning course especially, I found myself going from past to present quite a lot and I had to, like, really knuckle down and think what are you writing...

Lucy: Why was why were the tenses likely to be any different?

Pamela: I think with the practice-learning course because you are talking about moments in time.

Lucy: Right.

Pamela: Like if you look at this one (the practice- learning course assignment 4) it was about my first day at work and I think it was just getting my head back around it again because I did I feel I did swap the tenses around quite a lot and again it was only a minor point but I felt really stressed when I re-read it back

Lucy: What did you notice mistakes?

Pamela: Hmm, I should have put that word there you know

PM9: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

Despite Pamela's concern that she may make mistakes with her use of tenses, there is no evidence either from her text or comments by her tutor that any errors appeared in the final draft, and Pamela was unable during the interview to find any examples. This suggests that, although Pamela may have found the writing on the practice learning course challenging, what is more significant here is the degree of anxiety that she felt and her lack of confidence in her abilities.

Pamela also talks of her lack of confidence in relation to the process of drafting her writing. She describes a very short timescale during which she collects and organises her notes, writes directly on to the computer and then prints off to revise once, all within a three day period:

Lucy: What would happen if you did give yourself more time, because you implied that it would make you more worried?

Pamela: I think it would, I really think it would, I think if I've got more time to think about it then I've got more time to worry about it, if that makes sense it would be. With the first foundation course assignment, I really, really mulled... about two weeks mulling over it and mulling over it all the time and I thought I can't do this, I can't do this. They are expecting too much of me [laughter]. I can't do this and I sent that off and I thought well, I've failed and it was like that, constantly thinking that I've not done very well and I'm always thinking things like that, even though deep, deep down I'm quietly confident. I can't be wholly confident I'm just not that kind of person.

Lucy: So is that typical of you? Would you be like that when you did your other studies?

Pamela: Oh God yes, everything, yeah.

Lucy: Is that just to do with studies or is it that anyway?

Pamela: Anyway.

Lucy: It's nothing to do with like...

Pamela: That's me. [laughter] That's me, yeah

PM10: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

In the context of speaking about her lack of confidence in writing, Pamela also suggests that this lack of self-confidence (usually ungrounded judging by her consistently sound pass grades) is in fact typical of her more generally. This lack of self-confidence appears to have been a backdrop to Pamela's writing and has influenced her own writing practice in important ways, not least the fact that she looks to herself rather than to the actions of others to explain any problems that she encounters. One example of this, discussed in the second interview with Pamela, was her confusion over negative feedback on her use of 'structure' in her writing. Throughout the foundation course Pamela

received critical comment on her 'structure' (Pamela's tutor's word) in her assignments, which was not replicated in her practice learning course assignments. This was the only area of her writing that Pamela was receiving consistent negative comment on and she raised this issue during the interview:

| | |
|----------------|---|
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Do you think that you ever got to understand what he was getting at by structure?</i> |
| <i>Pamela:</i> | <i>No, no I tried and like with that one, is that?</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>[fourth assignment] this is, yes, and you had put a note on it yourself saying that you had really worked on the structure and you hoped that I was right</i> |
| <i>Pamela:</i> | <i>Yeah</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>and he said on his feedback that it was much better but he had also commented during the essay on the structure</i> |
| <i>Pamela:</i> | <i>Yeah, yeah because I felt that I had waffled, I'm quite terrible at waffling... but with that one I wouldn't, I thought I'm just going to write down my points and I'm going to talk about them and I was even under my word count I've always been over and I was under my word count because I thought I had stuck rigidly to what the question was asking, and I thought I was doing really well and then I get paragraph structure [laughter] so there was structure somewhere always in my feedback so no I don't think I ever got my structure right</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>What, what I mean you said that your guess was that structure in that case is keeping to the point</i> |
| <i>Pamela:</i> | <i>Yes I mean an intro, main points and a conclusion</i> |

PM11: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

From reading Pamela's texts it appeared to me that she had made a simple typographical error in all her assignments. The error involved pressing the return key after each sentence, giving the impression on the page that she was beginning a new paragraph after each full stop. In fact this was not her intention and she did leave a double space between her intended paragraphs. The written comments that Pamela received did not help her to identify this simple error, even by the end of the course, her foundation course tutor had

commented on her 'structure', which may have been a criticism of this error. Pamela's practice learning tutor had not commented on her structure, although she made the same typographical error on both courses. Her second foundation course assignment contained the comment:

Would suggest you continue to give attention to structuring your arguments and paragraphs

Pamela foundation course assignment 2 tutor comment

And her fourth the following:

I also felt that your TMA would be easier to follow if you're looked at your structure i.e. paragraphs.

Pamela foundation course assignment 4 tutor comment

Pamela reached the end of the foundation course still not understanding these repeated comments, but despite this, worked hard to rectify what she understood 'structure' to mean and attributed the error to her perceived tendency to 'waffle' (see above). It did not appear to occur to Pamela that the tutors' comments were unhelpful, inexplicit or even incorrect, even though only one of the tutors was picking up on the 'problem'. Throughout the writing of eight essays for the foundation course and three for the practice learning course, in all of which Pamela made the same typographical error, she continued to examine her own writing practice rather than to ask for clarification or question the helpfulness of her tutor's comments (as both Bernie and Patricia did). Given these circumstances I stepped out of the research role at this point and pointed out the typographical error to Pamela, an issue which was discussed in chapter 4.

Pamela's identities are relatively well hidden compared to those of Patricia and Bernie, but they are no less influential on her writing. The dominant theme for Pamela is her lack of self-confidence. Pamela's self-confidence may be attributable to her early experiences of being over-weight and bullied at school, together with her childhood belief that she was not good at writing, although there is no firm evidence of this from Pamela's interviews. Her belief that writing was not one of her strengths may have endured into her adult life, unlike Patricia who carried with her an inner confidence in her writing skills. What is more clearly evident, however, is the impact that her general lack of confidence has on her writing practices, which may explain her consequent assumption that any problems with her writing are attributable to herself only. In doing so she is enacting a different defence mechanism, that of 'introjection'. Whilst during projection: *What is projected onto another person represents the material which is unacceptable because of contradictions in the one who is doing the projecting.* (Henriques et al., 1998, p. 258) introjection enables a person to assimilate or draw in material which complements or re-affirms their identity, or is consistent with discourse positions supporting a particular identity. This commonly involves drawing in positive material, but can also include negative thoughts or beliefs. It is possible that Pamela is attributing to herself difficulties associated with academic writing experienced by all students in the study and so in part at least, likely to be attributable to external factors such as the written guidance and tutor behaviours. This introjection has a function, however, in that is consistent with Pamela's experience of vulnerability or being a victim, based on her early experiences of being bullied. She may have established an

effective defence mechanism based on attributing full responsibility for any difficulties on herself to avoid challenging others by attributing some responsibility elsewhere. Pamela's interviews are dotted with comments which provide suggestions of this introjection of negative assumptions about her abilities (*I'm full of self doubt, even when deep down I'm quietly confident, I can't see why anyone is interested in me so that's how I feel, this is me but is it really interesting?*)

These extracts also illustrate that the lack of confidence evident in much of Pamela's interviews does not fully represent the complexity of her feelings about writing.

7.4.2 Emerging identities

Despite Pamela's past personal and educational experiences which resulted in her perception of herself as a person who lacked self-confidence, she also talks about her growing confidence, her enjoyment of learning and her increasing expectations of her own performance. She has the confidence to feel that she deserved a higher grade on her the practice learning course assignments:

Pamela: Personally I thought I would have done better on the practice learning course I really did. The first one that's fair enough that first one was 46 I just barely passed to be honest and then it jumped up to 60 and then the next one was a 60 as well but I thought I had done better. That was one time when I thought that's not too bad

PM12: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

Pamela's growing confidence in her writing (at times despite the grades she was given) was matched by an increasing determination to avoid becoming disproportionately emotional about her studies. Pamela shares some details

about the extent of her anxiety and distress when studying for her HND in Childcare. In her first year of studying for the Diploma in Social Work, however, she is determined to change:

Pamela: I was determined not to get upset about this course. I can get quite angry and upset.

Lucy: Hmmm

Pamela: As long as it's, like my Mum said to me, if it starts with a four or you've not been particularly trying, she said you've passed, anything else you can work on don't stress yourself out over it.

Lucy: Hmm

Pamela: and I can honestly say that I have done that and that I have really enjoyed the year.

Lucy: Hmmm

Pamela: I've so enjoyed I've so missed studying this past couple of months I probably won't be saying this in February but at this point in time I've really missed it and I can't wait to get back in and do some more.

PM13: Pamela interview: 2nd July 2001

By the end of Pamela's second interview, she portrays herself as a person who is in control of her learning and deriving great pleasure from it. She has been able to reflect upon the unhelpful impact that her anxiety has had on her and made efforts to overcome it. Possibly through the (unexpected?) success that she has achieved both academically and professionally, Pamela is developing a core belief in her abilities, a belief that she does not allow herself to fully believe in. Alongside this reserved confidence Pamela also has great determination to control the emotions, which she is aware are unhelpful to her. In recognising this Pamela is demonstrating both understanding of the impact her emotions have on her writing but also the ability to develop strategies to deal with them.

There remain traces of shaky confidence in the way in which she drafts her texts, her concern over her use of tenses and her assumption that any difficulties she encounters are primarily down to her own abilities rather than any deficiencies in her tutors' support or the written guidance. Her energies are turned inwards to challenge her own behaviour rather than externally to challenge the actions of others.

7.5.David

Two broad issues emerge from David's discussion. Firstly, David demonstrates the strongest resistance of all the participants interviewed to writing about himself. Secondly, more in common with Pamela, David does not look beyond his own abilities to understand his grades or the comments made on his texts and very little comment is made about the individual course tutors. David presented himself as very secure and confident about his academic skills and writing abilities. Despite this academic confidence, David talks of his reluctance to engage in experiential writing and in doing so shares more private aspects of his identity, such as his reluctance to talk about himself.

7.5.1 It's not 'me'

David is in his mid 30's and was born in the south of England but at the age of three moved and grew up in Lancashire, which is where both of his parents originated. David retained a regional accent from Lancashire, which he feels positive about as he is very proud of where he comes from. David remembers his mother (whose family did not have a lot of money) putting on her '*posh*'

voice, and that his father's family were 'well to do' and 'wanting to 'move on'.

David describes himself as a child who found school work very easy whilst being 'terribly lazy', a person who has consistently been able to meet academic challenges without putting in a great deal of effort:

David: I have been lucky in my education in terms of wherever I have actually been inspired to put my mind to it I have found things easy.

D10: David interview: 17th April 2001

Consequently David did not meet any particular challenges in school despite rebelling against his mother's attempts to make him work, for example by locking him in the family caravan to do his homework. He shared with Patricia an enjoyment of writing, not only in school but also for his own entertainment, reading and writing fictional adventure stories:

David: It occurred to me relatively quickly that I could also write these sorts of stories as well. I remember writing quite long adventure stories where of course I was the hero!

D11: David interview: 17th April 2001

This confidence in his writing, from when he was in primary school, also applied to his studies and David presents a picture of himself as a person for whom academic success came with ease:

David: I found things relatively easy and I could get the marks that I needed without putting very much effort in.

D12: David interview: 17th April 2001

Early in David's secondary education he was pleased to be identified by his teacher as having the ability to move on to University which, as with Patricia, was an unusual achievement within his family and peers. This prediction did not inspire him to work harder but rather to sit back and 'await the inevitable':

David: Mr T said I can see David going to university and I must have been about thirteen, fourteen and thinking oh well I don't need to do anything more [laughter] it's all sorted out for me now I know I'm off [laughter].

D13: David interview: 17th April 2001

David went to a large metropolitan university and studied Politics. He did not express any anxiety at returning to higher education study and remembers beginning to become more conscious of the way in which he wrote when he had a blind tutor at university. This tutor required his students to read their work aloud to him and this experience prompted David to begin thinking more about his readers' experiences rather than writing in a vacuum:

David: Whether or not I am rationalising something now that then I was not entirely sure about but I remember being I suppose particularly careful and thereafter more careful that what was written read well.

D14: David interview: 17th April 2001

Returning to higher education after more than 10 years was not a challenge for David, partly because he continued to think about academic writing through helping friends with writing their MAs. David also writes a lot for his job as a welfare rights advisor, although he identifies that this writing is different from writing in social work as precision is required rather than reflection:

David: In welfare rights the standard of writing is different from social work
Lucy: How is it different?
David: Precision, rather than using reflection and internalised thoughts you have to do your research, you have to know, familiarity with the law.

D15: David interview: 17th April 2001

Writing was a significant part of David's work and he did not have a difficulty with adjusting his writing, apart from perhaps writing less formally for letters to relatives. David demonstrates his continuing confidence in his writing ability

through advising and proof reading the postgraduate writing of his colleagues, despite not having attained a higher degree himself:

David: I have not found it a challenge from that point of view, I mean one of the things that I haven't explained is that when you said have I done any academic writing I sort of laughed at that because I haven't but what I have done periodically is where colleagues have been doing MAs or the DipSW they have been asking me to go through their aims and make suggestions and edit.

D16: David interview: 17th April 2001

Unlike Patricia, David does not talk about any anxieties when he begins the Diploma in Social Work, on the contrary unlike any of the other participants David does not feel challenged by the foundation course:

David: I found the foundation course quite tedious to be honest

D17: David interview: 17th April 2001

Again as with Patricia, David does not identify any difficulties in adapting to writing in higher education and demonstrates a strong critical awareness of different forms of writing, as he did when identifying the formulaic nature of the children's adventure stories which he learnt to imitate as a child.

David presents himself as someone who is self assured and relaxed about his abilities, although not ambitious. His enjoyment (and success) in writing forms an important part of David's identity and, unlike Patricia, this is not compromised in adult life with the demands of competing identities. David appears to have incorporated his writing skills (and indeed academic abilities) into his adult professional and personal life, using them not only for his work but also to offer assistance to others who are completing academic qualifications higher than David has undertaken himself. This self-assurance is also demonstrated by David (again alone in the study) challenging the

academic validity of the writing required on the practice learning course assignments.

In David's first interview he suggests that he has worked out the rationale for the sequence of assignments:

David: I figured out the premise, the link between the first and the second and now the third essay which I have started to work on already, which is the identity, you know the identity thing, the relation between identify and the creation of the family, we've all got different identities therefore we've all got different value bases, and also I've a fairly clear idea about what a values base is and what ethics are and what those are to me.

D18: David interview: 17th April 2001

David also talked thoughtfully about the differences between the writing required on each course (see chapter 6) which he appeared to have been very clear about and not to have experienced any of the ambivalence or contradictions discussed by his peers.

David's awareness of and ability to adapt his writing for a particular audience or purpose is further evidenced by his perception that the writing that he undertakes as a welfare rights officer has transferable elements to academic writing:

David: So for me being used to reading that sort of stuff it's probably, has been marginally easier for me to convert and I don't as I say I don't have – I don't have a problem adjusting my writing style really anyway apart from making it probably less formal. That is sometimes, sometimes a problem, so letters to relatives are sometimes a problem [laughter].

David interview: 17th April 2001

This extract illustrates again David's ease with switching between different expectations of his writing for different purposes, but he also hints here of his discomfort with less formal and more personal forms of writing. This theme of

David's discomfort with personal writing is particularly strong in his discussion of the practice learning course which raised some issues for David, partly due to his reluctance to write about himself. David attributes his initial discomfort about the practice learning course assessment to the nature of the assessment tasks, rather than any difficulty or misunderstanding of the writing requirements. David indicated resistance to writing about personal experiences and his application of values to practice, partly because he was not comfortable writing too much about himself but also because he felt that the word limit and context of writing unreasonably limited his ability to express himself:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| <i>David:</i> | <i>I suppose I don't want to give too much of myself in an academic essay, largely because I think that it is, and this is going to sound even worse now, people can say anything, you can write anything down, and I could join in with that...</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmmm.</i> |
| <i>David:</i> | <i>But values are demonstrable in action and I've got 17, you know, 18 years, or what ever it is, and I am happy to talk about it if it is a two way thing.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmmm.</i> |
| <i>David:</i> | <i>And I know this is a slightly false environment, but say in supervision your practice teacher says...I'm quite happy to talk about it.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmm</i> |
| <i>David:</i> | <i>Because there is a chance to nail misconceptions or explain things in perhaps more detail or just give a slightly softer personal point of view.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmm</i> |
| <i>David:</i> | <i>Demonstrating understanding, I don't think that there is room in your, what, 2000 words or whatever it was you can't do it properly.</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmm</i> |
| <i>David:</i> | <i>Demonstrating understanding. I'm not going to try and explain myself in 2000 words.</i> |

D19: David interview: 17th April 2001

This principled objection to the method of assessment on the practice learning course was a significant issue throughout David's interviews. Where other students focused on either the clarity of the guidance or the feedback from the tutor, David was more concerned with his difficulty in accepting the rationale for the assessment strategy. He shares with his peers the experience of receiving a lower grade on his practice learning course assignments than on the foundation course, but David does not associate this with the support or guidance that he received from his tutor, but accounts for it by his reluctance to 'play the game' on the practice learning course:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| <i>David:</i> | <i>I knew with the first one that I was not, I was not playing the game</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>David:</i> | <i>and I knew I wasn't. And consequently did as well as I felt the quality of the work deserved if you like</i> |
| <i>Lucy:</i> | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>David:</i> | <i>I feel that I have tried to play the game a little bit more in the second essay</i> |

D20: David interview: 5th July 2001

David is suggesting here that in his first assignment he was knowingly unwilling to fully meet the assessment requirements and was therefore not dissatisfied with his grade. In subsequent assignments he moderated his position and in his words '*warmed to the task*'. Whilst this attitude appears to indicate self-confidence, it also reflects David's discomfort with moving away from the emotionally safe formulaic area (for him) of formal writing and into the more threatening waters of sharing aspects of himself in writing. Although David intellectually rationalises his objection to this form of writing, this is primarily on the grounds that he may not be able to fully justify himself and could consequently be misjudged as a person.

David's confidence in his writing abilities as an adaptable and skilled writer is affirmed not only by his own academic success despite little effort, but also through colleagues and peers seeking his support in their writing. He is aware of his resistance to playing the game on the first practice learning course assignments and accepts a low grade as a just reward for his 'bolshie' resistance. David gives little information about why his resistance softened for subsequent assignments, other than that he 'warmed to the task'.

This self-assured, academically confident person is not the whole picture. David also acknowledges that, academically justified or not, sharing personal information about himself is not something that he finds easy. He portrays himself as more comfortable with the emotionally remote writing of the politics essay undertaken as an undergraduate or precise reports undertaken in his welfare rights role. David also seems to privilege these forms of writing as being of a superior 'standard' to the introspective, reflective writing in social work. The dissonance created by David's feelings and beliefs about social work writing create a difficulty for him, despite his apparent prowess in academic writing. This could be interpreted as an example of a different form of defence mechanism, and one which is more conscious and overt than projection and introjection. David is cautious about the contexts and ways in which he is prepared to share personal information, and manages this by explicitly taking a principled stand to avoid doing so. Interestingly, David's reluctance to trust the process of sharing his personal experiences in writing weakened (*I warmed to the task*), possibly because he felt more able to trust his addressee and found the process was not as threatening as he anticipated. What David shared with the other students was that engaging in

writing on the practice learning course generated strong feelings. David expressed his anxiety couched in well-reasoned academic terms, unlike Pamela, Patricia and Bernie who were more willing to openly express anger, frustration and disappointment.

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the individual student identities and writing practices illustrated with the case studies. Underpinning this discussion have been the concepts of circularity, human interaction and emotion as important dimensions of writing practices (see 2.2.3). Circularity was illustrated through the ways in which tutor feedback influenced not only what students wrote (for example content and organisation) but also the ways in which they felt about their writing based on feedback. This was particularly evident on the practice learning course where the content was more emotionally charged. For Bernie and Patricia, this had the consequence of foregrounding their interpersonal interaction with their tutor and indeed of their tutors' identities. Bernie and Patricia, however, perceived their tutors' identities through a lens influenced by the writing task itself and by their own histories. For example, Bernie's experiences of racism (particularly in the context of education) were foregrounded in her relationship and perception of her tutor and his responses to her writing. Her writing practices were therefore influenced by both her tutor's actual and perceived or assumed responses to her writing. In this way my data seems to support both the importance and interconnectivity of the circularity, emotion and human interaction in writing practices.

In this chapter I have also made connections through the data between writer identities and psychological / psychoanalytic theories. Sociological perspectives on writer identity recognise multiple social identities. The concepts of multiplicity and salience, however, provide a psychological frame which enabled me to not only explain the number of identities but also explore the ways in which they jostle for significance in particular contexts, for example Patricia's roles as mother, student and becoming-professional social worker. A psychoanalytic perspective could add the concept of the core self (discussed further below in 8.3.2.3), acting as a motivational drive, connecting historical and emotional facets of human experience.

8. Chapter eight: Discussion

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will begin in 8.2 by summarising the gap in the literature that I hope to have addressed through this thesis. I will then present my findings, which I have organised into two broad sections: 8.3.1 addresses writing in social work education, and 8.3.2 addresses issues relating to a psychosocial perspective on writer identity (introduced in 3.8). Based upon these findings I draw together, in 8.4, four main ways in which this thesis contributes to current literature: student writing in social work, reflective writing, the use of first person singular pronouns and writer identity. In 8.5 I offer an evaluation of my methodology, with a particular focus on participant involvement in creating my data. The implications of this study relate primarily to pedagogy, and in 8.6 I explore these implications in relation to both institutional and individual teaching practices. In 8.7 I offer some thoughts on future research arising from this thesis, returning to the potentially rich vein of applying psychoanalytic approaches to writer identity. Finally in 8.8, I offer a brief reflection on my own research journey.

8.2 Addressing the gap identified in the literature

This study has drawn upon research and literature arising from the study of academic writing within a broadly sociological approach. In attempting to develop current sociologically orientated perspectives on writer identity, I have drawn additionally upon a number of concepts which derive broadly from the

fields of psychology and psychoanalysis, offering a 'psychosocial' perspective. Psychoanalysis has long (if ambivalent) associations with the discipline of social work. Although it has been suggested that psychoanalytic ideas have had little recent relevance to social work practice (Pease et al., 2003) psychoanalytic theories underlie many of the diverse theories of practice taught on social work programmes (Payne, 1998). In this thesis I focus in particular to the areas of emotion and the unconscious, both of which have a particular relevance to both social work and writer identity.

In addition to introducing a psychosocial approach to writer identity, my contribution to the literature on writer identity is to focus on one discipline, that of social work, from an insider perspective. I have built upon a growing literature relating to reflective writing (Walker, 1985; Boud, 1999; Janks, 1999; Winter et al 1999; Moon, 1999b; Crème, 2000; Moon, 2002; Bolton, 2003; Oldham and Henderson, 2004; Thorpe, 2004; Crème, 2005) and a less well developed literature on writing in social work in the UK (Watson, 2002; Heron and Murray, 2004). The relevance of the self in reflective writing also led me to explore research on pronoun use (Ivanič, 1996; Tang and John, 1999; Hyland, 2001) focusing on specific pronoun use in the applied discipline of social work.

My contribution has also been as an insider to social work education but relative newcomer to the study of the field of academic writing. I have brought my own experiences and reflections as a social work practitioner, educator and as a student and used these alongside the data and literature in my analysis. My experiences and disciplinary perspectives have enabled me to

draw upon literature and research which has not, to date, been applied to student writing.

8.3 Findings

The following section outlines my findings from this study. These divide broadly into two areas: the nature of writing on social work programmes and writer identity in the context of social work education.

8.3.1 Writing in social work education

Through a close examination of two courses within the first year of a social work programme, I identified some particular features of writing in social work education in chapters 5 and 6. The two courses included in this study provided an opportunity to compare different approaches to assessed writing, both within the context of social work, which highlighted some issues of particular interest.

8.3.1.1 Writing conventions across and within courses are implicit and taught inconsistently

Lea and Stierer eds. (2000) highlight the ways in which different academic writing conventions are presented to students, not only between institutions and disciplines but also within disciplines in one institution. My findings bear this out in relation to the diversity of expectations both between the two courses comprising a single year of study and also between tutors (see 5.5). Although data based on the texts themselves and from tutors and students indicated clear differences between the required conventions on each course (see 5.5 - 5.6), this was not clearly signposted in the written course guidance

(see 5.4) or communication between tutors and students (see 5.6. and 6.3).

Assessed student texts on both courses, for example, were referred to interchangeably as 'essays' and 'assignments'. The 'social science essay' was treated as the default target in the written course guidance and generic writing support materials available to students.

8.3.1.2 Tutors' expectations of students' writing on the practice learning course were particularly vague.

Students expressed less anxiety about writing on the foundation course than the practice learning course and both students and tutors perceived the writing on the foundation course to be more straightforward (see 5.3 and 5.6). This could have been for several reasons. The written guidance on the foundation course was relatively prescriptive and there was a degree of consistency across written guides for tutors and students as well as within study notes and writing toolkits. All students identified a greater familiarity with the target genre on the foundation course based upon prior experiences of study. Data also suggested that the 'reflective' nature of the practice learning course was more challenging than the more objective 'social science based essay' required on the foundation course (discussed in 5.6 and 6.4). Maybe the most significant challenge for writers on the practice learning course was that the target writing 'style' was primarily conveyed through tutor feedback, and data from tutors themselves illustrated the degree of confusion and ambivalence about what was expected of students' writing (see 5.5). Writing on the practice learning course was referred to vaguely as requiring a 'house style' which was specific to social work writing.

8.3.1.3 The practice learning course involved ‘reflective writing’ which required the challenging integration of theoretical and experiential elements

Although tutors on the practice learning course were imprecise in describing the target style which they suggested existed, there was some consistency in their expectation that students’ writing should include two distinct elements. These elements, introduced in 6.2, were what I refer to as ‘theoretical ‘ and ‘experiential’ writing. Writing for the practice learning course, therefore, involved students finding a ‘mysterious’ path between theoretical ‘academic’ writing and personal experiential writing. Discussions with tutors suggested that both theoretical and experiential elements were expected within one student text on the practice learning course and that ideally these elements should be integrated, or in other words the student should inter-weave reflective accounts of experiences with relevant discussion of theory to explain or justify their actions. Swaying too far towards the academic drew tutor criticism of being ‘defensively academic’ whilst at the other extreme students risked the criticism of being anecdotal. Tutors’ expectations, although imprecise, implied the need for an integration of writing based on experience and writing which drew on theory and ‘authoritative knowledge’, or in other words published sources. Despite this expectation, tutors acknowledged that such integration was extremely complex and difficult.

Data from students illustrated a diversity of approaches to including experiential and theoretical writing (discussed in 6.3.1), but also highlighted that integrating these two elements was challenging, in part due to the

emotional aspect of experiential writing. From my analysis, it seems that integration involved students moving between several key dimensions:

- a narrative position, in which the author recounted a practice (or indeed personal) experience
- a reflective position in which the author critically comments on the experience, and finally
- an analytical position in which the author supports this critical comment through argumentation using authoritative sources (the theoretical element).

There were a few isolated examples of students achieving this integration, such as the extract from Bernie's practice learning course text in 6.4.2. In the main, however, students partitioned experiential from theoretical writing enabling them to regulate the emotive impact of the task as well as separating out cognitively two potentially different ways of writing. One possible explanation for the challenge posed by integrating these elements could be provided by Hoadley-Maidment (2000), as discussed in 2.3.1. She suggests that such synthesis involves high-order cognitive skills of analysis and critical reflection, which are not normally associated with early stages of higher education study. The experiences of students in my study certainly support Hoadley-Maidment's argument that an integration of such skills is demanded of students in their first year of study and that many students found such an integration difficult.

8.3.1.4 Students' reflective writing involved a particular use of the first person singular pronouns: 'I as narrator-reflector'

The particular use of first person singular pronouns on the practice learning course and the foundation course is discussed in 6.4, in the context of the work of Tang and John (1999). An analysis of the use of first person singular pronouns across the two courses studied resulted in two key findings. Firstly, students consistently made a greater use of first person singular pronouns on the practice learning course than on the foundation course, re-affirming the significantly different conventions of writing on each course. Where it was used, it was either (in Tang and John's words) as 'I as opinion holder', 'I as guide' or 'I as architect', all three established in Tang and John's study (1999) of English language essays. The practice learning course texts contained a significantly greater number of uses of first person singular pronouns.

Secondly, in applying Tang and John's (1999) taxonomy, it appeared that although the positions of 'I as opinion holder', 'I as guide' and 'I as architect' had some relevance, the nature of the writing task on the practice learning course led students to a variation from any of these positions, in part due to the experiential / emotive nature. The position of 'narrator-reflector' situated the author as narrator of their own accounts of experience, which then formed the focus for discussion and analysis and provided an emotional immersion in an experience. Incidences of 'narrator-reflector' typically involved reflections on the author's feelings and values in relation to the experience narrated. These were in some cases very emotive, such as Patricia's discussion of working with a dying woman and Bernie's reflections on experiencing racism within her work team. There were few similar uses of first person singular

pronouns in the foundation course, and where experience was offered as an example of practice, this was clearly marked as an *observation* on a practice example rather than an immersion in a personal experience.

8.3.1.5 The writing practices developed by students involved the key elements of circularity, human interaction and emotion

In 2.3 I discussed the use of the terms 'social practices' (Bazerman, 1981; Bazerman, 1988; Prior, 1998; Bazerman and Prior, 2004), 'literacy practices' (Baynham, 1995; Ivanič, 1997; Lillis, 2001) and 'writing practices' (Prior, 1998; Lea and Street, 1998). I have drawn upon these concepts throughout this thesis, in particular on the concept of writing practices. In 2.3 I suggested that students developed individual writing practices in order to negotiate the demands of writing and I have drawn upon the features of circularity of actions, human interaction and emotion in exploring writing practices. As identified in 2.3, all of these factors affected students differently, but interaction between student and tutor (past and current) and the circular impact of feedback and writing were particularly striking features affecting students' writing practices. These dynamics reflected not only individuals' identities and subject positions but also defensive coping strategies developed in order to manage sometimes emotionally difficult tasks. I will return to the implications of writing practices in the context of reflective writing below in 8.3.2.1.

8.3.1.6 Reflective writing involved students in emotionally demanding self-disclosure

A particular feature of student writing on the practice learning course is the role of personal experience. Whilst some experiences were associated with work-based practice, students were also required to reflect upon personal beliefs and values, which sometimes led them into sharing potentially personal and emotive experiences. As discussed in 2.7, in a supervisory context, or indeed in therapy, such sharing of intimate personal information or experiences might be referred to as 'self-disclosure' and treated with particular care by the listener.

Self-disclosure is not a term that has commonly been used in relation to academic writing, even within research on journaling or reflective writing. The concept of expressive or personal writing in the US, discussed in 2.6, is relevant in that it raises some similar issues (Berman, 2001). Although the research discussed in 2.6 has arisen from different contexts, one common feature is the impact on both the writer and marker when texts require the author to share personal experience for the purposes of assessment. This perspective recognises the social and potentially emotional power that self-disclosure can have in any relationship, but particularly where there is an imbalance of power between the parties. My study has considered the impact and experience for students of participating in assessed writing acts which require varying degrees of self-disclosure. Berman (2001), in discussing personal writing, draws the comparison between the writer-reader relationship and that of the analyst-analysand and in doing so recognises the similarities which arise where students 'disclose' personal information. Within social work

such self-disclosure has a particular significance with associations of power, social norms, trust and empathy, all factors which have parallels in the student tutor relationship when personal information is offered in the context of academic writing.

The experiences of students in this study, therefore, highlight the way in which the requirement for self-disclosure in academic writing has the potential to create an emotionally sensitised context for writing (see 8.3.2.1). This has an impact upon not only the choices made by students, but also on the relationship between the student and tutor.

8.3.2 A psychosocial perspective on writer identity

Through focusing in on individual student experiences, I argue that there are issues relevant to student writing which cannot be explained from a sociological perspective alone. For all four student case studies, writing generated strong feelings. The explanations for the feelings generated are complex and individual to each person, but the tools provided by a power-desire-knowledge perspective (Henriques et al., 1998) offer some interesting paths for further thought. In particular, an awareness of the ways in which the self (drawing upon historical experiences, desire and discourses) negotiates and makes sense of experiences and relationships could provide a valuable insight into apparently irrational responses to writing tasks.

Student identity has arisen as a theme throughout this study; the experience of each student participating in academic writing has been influenced by 'who they are'. In chapter 2, I outlined the influential work of Ivanič (1997) on student identity, which has focused on the way in which social identity or roles

are played out through texts. I also suggested that there were some useful concepts derived from a psychological perspective on identity which could further contribute to our understanding of writer identity. These concepts include multiplicity and salience, unconscious / irrational behaviours and the existence of a self as the root of desire. These concepts arose as they appeared helpful in addressing some of the issues within my interpretation of data which were problematic when I applied available sociologically orientated perspectives on writer identity. While I do not suggest that the analysis here is in any way complete or comprehensive, further exploration of the usefulness of a psychosocial perspective may open doors to a greater understanding of what is meant by writer identity.

8.3.2.1 Emotion was a significant influence on writing practices

Closely associated with a consideration of the impact of required self-disclosure on student's writing on the practice learning course (discussed in 8.3.1.5) is the issue of emotionality. The expression of strong emotion was a striking feature throughout all of the student interviews and was associated with a range of points in the writing / feedback process. All four students had strong feelings about their writing and the feedback that they received (see for example 5.6.2, 6.3.2 and 7.3.2). All four students encountered difficulties with negotiating the implicit academic conventions fed to them primarily through the grades and feedback on their assignments. This indirect conduit for information about how they should write, together with the nature of the writing itself, which involved intimate discussion of self and values, resulted in strong feelings. Although the strongest emotions in the students in this study were generated from the practice learning course, emotion was also relevant

to the writing on the foundation course. Students' prior experiences of writing (good or bad) influenced how they felt about their writing as did current pressures and experiences. For Bernie, her identity and experiences as a black woman were central to her past and present writing experiences and influenced her relationships with her tutor, her responses to feedback and also her feelings about her own writing. Patricia was influenced by her positive prior writing experiences, but this alone was not enough to counter anxieties of a new writing challenge as an adult with competing demands upon her. Patricia carried with her the influence of a childhood where she was bullied and did not experience school as a place where she succeeded. David retained an inner core of confidence which had grown from repeated experiences of academic success, even where he had not striven particularly hard.

8.3.2.2 There was evidence of both the multiplicity of students' identities and the context-specific salience of particular identities

The influence of multiple aspects of identity, or indeed of identities, is commonly accepted within the literature on writer identity (as discussed in chapter 3). The case studies presented in this thesis illustrates the existence of multiple social identities (student, black woman, social worker, trainee, mother, husband, expert writer, reflector). These social roles jostle alongside more emotionally shaded aspects of identity which are more difficult to encompass within a label but are equally important, if more fluid. For example David sees himself as capable but lazy, someone who could succeed if he applies himself, he is also a private person who values the quality of family life over professional or academic success. He finds it difficult to share personal

or emotive information in an academic context and feels safer within the more dispassionate boundaries of legal advice and academia. Bernie believes in her inner abilities, but struggles to maintain this self-belief when she is criticised; she is sensitive to the possibility of repeated racist and discriminatory experiences which stimulate both anger and hurt, reinforcing her determination to prove herself. One of her defence mechanisms (see discussion in 3.8.4.1 and 7.3.2) is to externalise criticism as unjust. This protects her from her own potential weaknesses and enables her to withstand perceived hostility.

8.3.2.3 The core self

These outlines are necessarily brief and crude, but they are intended to illustrate that, even based on the limited interview data presented here, these individuals' emotional worlds are intrinsically tied up with their social roles and subject positioning. Moreover, each student continued to be affected by significant past experiences which influenced the ways in which they made sense of events and experiences, their actions and emotional responses.

The emotional and historical aspects of identity, along with the unconscious, are within the domain of the core self. As such emotion and historical influences are particularly important in determining desire, or in other words influencing the motivation and actions of individuals and the ways in which they occupy social roles and respond to contexts and interactions. The aspects of David and Bernie's identities outlined here are the salient ones for them in the context of academic writing. In a different context the pen picture I have presented above may be very different. Bernie's need to project her

difficulties in order to protect herself emotionally may be very specific to the context in which she experiences herself as powerless (see 3.8.4.1 for a discussion of projection). She has an educational history which has made her very aware of situations in which she may be disempowered as a writer and she has developed strategies to manage this. Her negative experiences appear to reinforce her expectation that she will face racism and disadvantage in her studies.

8.3.2.4 Unconscious and apparently irrational behaviour were features of students' writing practices

I was aware that the text-oriented interview had the potential to make unconscious writing practices conscious. For example Pamela was made aware, through the interview, of the relatively trivial error of pressing the return key after each full stop, discussed in 7.4.1. Aspects of unconscious writing practices, which remained unconscious, are difficult to verify without the confirmation of intent or meaning by the student concerned. However, Janks' (2002) concept of issues which are 'sacred' or touch a person's 'fibre of belief' (discussed in 3.8.3) is useful here. The existence of particular issues which are emotionally charged for particular individuals (or indeed communities or societies) may offer an explanation for some apparently irrational behaviours (explored in 3.8.3). As discussed above, racism may be an example for Bernie, who in suspecting that her 'structure' has been unfairly criticised, accuses her tutor of racism, mixing her up with another African Caribbean student and anticipating poor spelling and grammar from black students. Whilst this racist discourse may be familiar and justifiable, there is little or no evidence of it in Bernie's case. The African Caribbean student, who she

believes her tutor has confused her with, according to Bernie, is a strong writer. Bernie's text in fact contains little correction of her language or criticism of her text structure. An explanation of this apparently irrational behaviour could be that Bernie has experienced such racism in the past, she is familiar with discourses relating to racism and, perhaps due to vulnerability in her own confidence, she anticipates discrimination. What is significant, however, is that the emotional impact on Bernie is real, as are the consequences for her writing practices resulting from a negative circularity involving her tutor feedback. Similar examples could be followed through in relation to Patricia's 'sacred' (Janks, 2002) issue of bereavement or David's of self-disclosure in an academic context.

8.3.2.5. Students used coping strategies which included projection and introjection

Although all four students interviewed shared a common anxiety about managing a challenging and emotionally sensitive writing task, they demonstrated this anxiety in very different ways. Viewed in the context of Chelune's work (1979) on self-disclosure, students writing on the practice learning course are undertaking involuntary self-disclosure in a context where there is an unequal balance of power and a demand for a high degree of expressive value in order to achieve success. Added to this, students are engaged in a challenging writing task for which they have received contradictory or confusing guidance. Success for these students is about risking more than failing an academic course. They are seconded students who, having worked for many years for their employer, have a single chance to achieve a professional qualification and status. Consequently there are

financial as well as academic, professional social identity factors all hanging upon their success.

Bernie and Patricia both appear to have projected some of their difficulties with writing, looking to external factors (their tutors, the university) to explain their difficulty rather than themselves. Their defensive response is particularly clear when compared with the way in which Pamela seems to introject her difficulties with her writing.

The application of the concept of projection to student writing is not intended to suggest that student writers are unreasonably critical of either the university or their individual tutors. As has been illustrated in chapter 5, the consistency and clarity of advice given to students on the programme can, within the context of academic literacies, be seen as a good example of 'mysterious' institutional practices (Lillis, 2001). It does however illustrate some interesting differences (related to student identity) in how individual students respond to such mysterious practices. These include defence mechanisms such as projection and introjection.

8.4 Contribution to the field

Through this thesis I have focused on student writing in the particular context of social work education. I have also taken a particular interest in writer identity and the contribution that established thinking from the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis could make to our understanding of students' writing practices. This section is divided into three parts which reflect the main contributions made by this thesis. Firstly I will address the nature of student

writing in social work education, with particular reference to writing which I have referred to in this thesis as 'reflective writing'. Secondly I will consider the implications of my data for current work on the use of first person pronouns. Finally I will offer my thoughts on the ways in which this thesis contributes to our understanding of writer identity.

8.4.1 Student writing in social work

Through this thesis I have explored in some depth the experience of students and tutors of engaging in writing and assessing student writing in the context of social work education. Building on previous research within an academic literacies frame, my thesis confirms the complex and often contradictory conventions surrounding writing within one programme of study. Variation in expectations appears in the written guidance available within and across courses as well as between tutors. The labelling of assessed writing as 'essay' or 'assignment' is interchangeable and does not reflect vaguely articulated but significant differences in writing conventions between the courses. Unlike previous research which has identified considerable difficulties with the concept of the 'essay', data from this study suggests that where the 'essay' was explicitly taught using consistent and relatively prescriptive guidance, students and tutors were comparatively confident in both writing and assessing. Difficulties arose, however, on the practice-based course, where tutors expected a 'house style' which differed significantly from the 'essay' explicitly taught to students previously. On this course the only context in which the vague target style was 'taught' to student was through feedback on their writing.

8.4.2 Reflective writing

The difficulties experienced by students and tutors writing and assessing on the practice learning course highlighted differences between the target styles on the two courses studied. I would suggest, moreover, that the particular demands of writing within the context of professional social work education resulted in a target style that implicitly breaches several commonly accepted conventions of academic writing. Through this study I have begun to theorise the specific nature of this practice-based writing, which I have referred to as 'reflective writing'. There is a considerable literature on what is loosely termed 'reflective writing', and in this study I have used the term to refer very specifically to assessed student writing which requires the writer to integrate reflective discussion of personal experience and values with critical analysis of theory and authoritative knowledge. In 6.2, I offer a simple Figure to illustrate the place of reflective writing within the spectrum of assessed writing undertaken by social work students. Within this paradigm I refer to the two dimensions of reflective writing as 'experiential' and 'theoretical' writing. Whilst the 'theoretical writing' dimension has something in common with the social science essay (as presented in this particular study) the emphasis is less on marshalling knowledge to build an academic argument and more on using knowledge (including for example legislation and policy as well as theories of practice) to undertake a critical evaluation of the author's own practice. 'Experiential writing' encompasses writing in which the author outlines and reflects upon experience based on either their practice or personal experiences, including values.

Based upon this study, there are some important implications, which arose from the fact in reflective writing the author is central to the text. Any discussion or theory or knowledge revolves around the author's own experiences and values. This brings into contention the nature of objectivity, a stated objective of 'academic writing' broadly on the programme studied. Based upon the case studies presented here, the content of reflective writing was highly personal and subjective, but course guidance and tutors' comments suggested that they expected students' analysis and evaluation of their experiences to be academically objective (see 5.3.1 and 6.2). This deeply personal content had implications both for the ways students felt about writing and receiving feedback on their work and also on the way in which they organised their content. It also sensitised students' experience of receiving feedback and a grade on their work as well as creating a challenge for tutors who were aware (at least in part) of the ways in which students might experience their comments. Finally, a more concrete feature differentiating reflective writing from the 'essay' which was identified both in interviews and through an analysis of examples of student writing, was the extensive use of the first person singular pronouns (*I, me, my*).

8.4.3 Pronoun use

Evidence from this study suggests that prior work on the use of first person singular pronouns in student writing has been based on an analysis of texts that have not taken account of the ways in which students are required to write in social work and perhaps in similarly vocational disciplines. The centrality of the self and of personal experience to such reflective writing encourages, if not requires, the author to use self-reference in a context not

previously recognised. Building on the work of Tang and John (1999), I have referred to this specific usage as 'I as narrator-reflector' and have identified it as indicating the use of the various forms of first person singular pronouns (*I*, *me* or *my*) to recount and reflect upon personal experiences which form the basis for discussion in the text. Whilst in this instance the author's personal 'experience' forms the focus for the text much as a piece of research might, it is qualitatively different both due to its personal nature and also the task the student is required to 'do' with this content. Reflective writing requires the author to relate this discussion to personal values and beliefs as well as personal change. In this way it is more intimately connected with the author as an individual than an objective account of a research process or evidence-based argument.

First person singular pronouns were used significantly more in reflective writing than in the 'essay' and where used they were predominantly in the role of 'I as narrator-reflector'. This use, therefore, appears to be particularly associated with reflective or practice-based writing. As such it helps to signal one of the clearest features of reflective writing that was implicitly understood by students.

8.4.4 Writer identity

In exploring writer identity through this thesis, I have consistently found that purely sociological approaches limit the possibilities for exploring the student experience. This is because sociological approaches do not provide any tools for exploring writers' unconscious or emotional worlds, both of which have great significance in the context of reflective writing which is concerned with

values and personal experience. Drawing upon psychology and psychoanalysis has opened up alternative perspectives on identity, in particular the core self (discussed in 3.8.2). I have focused on a necessarily limited number of contributions from the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis to illustrate the ways in which such approaches could supplement current models of writing identity. I have explored these areas within the guiding framework of a concept of writing practices which recognises the interconnected features of circularity, human interaction and emotion as factors influencing the ways in which students write.

In this discussion I have drawn upon notions of identity influenced by the psychoanalytically orientated work of Henriques et al. (1998), in particular the existence of an enduring core self which is the seat of desire, or motivation. Henriques et al. construct their concept of identity through the paradigm of knowledge-desire-power relations (discussed in 3.8.4.1). The self is the location of historical experiences (Henriques et al., 1998, p. 222) and is influenced by discourses and deep-seated emotional influences and, through the influence of these, responds to and constructs social identities, primarily through interaction with others. In this way, writing takes place within a sociological context, outlined by Ivanič in Figure 14, but is influenced by historical and interpersonal experiences and exchanges. Through writing, the student brings to such interaction prior and current discourses and emotional influences which affect the writing process. The writing process (including interaction with the tutor and the tutor's feedback) then in turn becomes a part of the student's 'identity-constructing' experiences.

8.4.4.1 Circularity, shadows and representations

Based upon my interviews with students and tutors, it became clear to me that student writing involved a circular process, typified by the stages of 'pre text', 'in-text' and 'post text'.

- **'Pre-text'** involves the process of preparing to write and is influenced by students' prior educational or other significant experiences. Some of these experiences will be evident in the final text. The pre-text stage represents thinking (including reflecting on prior feedback and experiences) and drafting.
- **'In-text'** is the point at which the preparation is translated into a written text and therefore becomes fixed and is therefore that which is made available for the intended reader. As a fixed text, it becomes a focus for the communicative interaction between the student and tutor in which the identities are played out. The tutor, in assessing and commenting on the text, is influenced not only by his or her experience of the student, but by their own personal reactions to the student text influenced by the tutor's identity and experiences.
- **'Post text'** is the period of reflection following the return of the marked text to the student, it continues to be a part of the student-tutor interaction, carrying with it communication from the tutor which is (imperfectly) translated by the student.

I suggest that this communication is necessarily 'imperfect' because, drawing on Hall (2001) discussed above in 3.5, all communication between

individuals involves imperfect translation due to cultural differences between the communicants. In the creation of a new text (entering a second 'pre-text stage'), the student now adds this interaction with the tutor to their collection of influential experiences. Thus one cycle is completed; the process of drafting and feeding back being influenced by a number of 'shadows' at the pre- and post-text stages and of 'representations' at the 'in-text' stage.

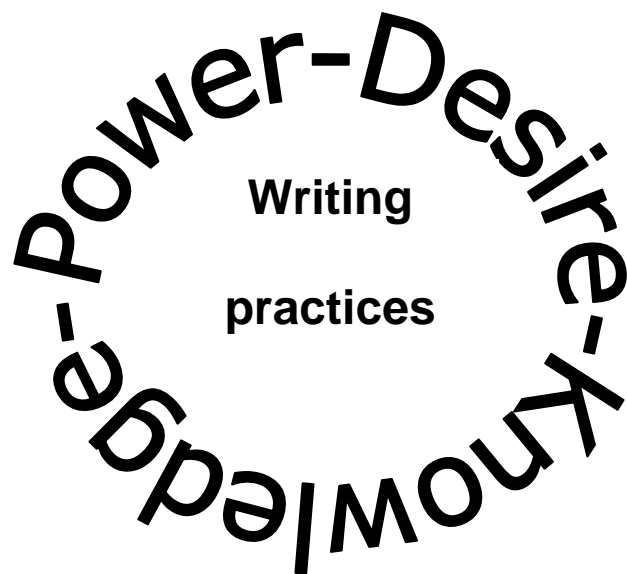
I am using the concepts of shadows and representations to illustrate the ways in which the process of creating a text can be influenced by, for example, experiences and interpersonal interactions which may not appear obviously relevant. For example Bernie's relationship with her tutor, as well as her educational and cultural history, cast shadows on both the creation of her texts and the ways in which she reviewed her feedback on them. Similarly such experiences were 'represented' in her actual text in both subtle and more obvious ways. Biographical representations played out through narrative and reflective accounts of personal experience were very obvious examples in the reflective writing texts. More subtle examples of representations might include Bernie's linguistic or structural choices about constructing her text, which resulted from her prior experiences. The difference, therefore, between a shadow and a representation is only that the representation is captured within a text and so is less transitory.

The pre- and post-text stages share shadows that influence the practices taking place in them. These shadows involve personal histories or biographical shadows (arising from the writer's past experiences), human interaction or interpersonal shadows (arising from the consequences of

specific interaction with others which leave a mark on the writing practices) and discursal shadows (arising from the writer's relationship with discourses). I have discussed such historical influences on identity above in 7.2.1, 7.3.1 and 7.6. I suggest that the shadows represent the ways in which identity becomes relevant to the writer's practices in each stage of the writing process. I would add to the concept of biography those emotionally driven aspects of identity, discussed in 3.8.2 and 6.4.

The significance of identifying shadows and representations as features of a cyclical writing process is that provides a conceptualisation of writing being dynamic, interactive and affected by a very wide range of influences. Such influences are well conveyed by Henriques et al's model of Knowledge-desire-power relations:

Figure 27: Knowledge-desire-power relations



The context of knowledge-desire-power relations influences all aspects of writing practices, including interaction with others, the creation of texts and also the inner experiences of the writer. This model is psychosocial in that it does not separate 'identity' from social context, but recognises that the many facets of identity (public social identities and the core self) interact dynamically with social forces of power and knowledge relations. This conceptualisation provides an exciting model to further explore the experiences of students engaged in writing, particularly where such writing involves reflection.

8.5 Critique of methodology

8.5.1 The scope of the study

This study has focused on the experiences of one tutor group of students from a single university social work programme. I interviewed these students twice over a full academic year and drew together interview data from the written course guidance, student texts and interview data from tutors. This approach, together with my own insider perspective as a social work educator on the programme studied, provided a significant degree of understanding on which to base my analysis. I was aware, however, of the limitations that arose from focusing on only one university employing a particular method of social work education delivery. A more extensive study would have enabled me to replicate my methodology across social work programmes in different universities. The limitation of my study to one university arose in part due to the difficulties that I experienced in recruiting both students and tutors. I did initially attempt to recruit students from two additional universities but, despite considerable enthusiasm from the staff group at one site, neither resulted in

sufficient student participants to proceed. My success in recruiting participants at the university studied resulted to a large extent from my established position within the institution.

The involvement of students from more than one university could have strengthened this study in several ways. Firstly I could have compared issues arising from student-tutor interaction on a face-to-face programme with the distance-learning programme studied. My data suggested that the quality of relationships with tutors did not rely primarily upon the extent of face-to-face contact (for example 7.2.3) but I could have explored this further on a programme where such interaction was more extensive. I was also aware that the programme studied provided only one example of writing conventions differing between courses within one programme. Although my data supported previous research (Lea and Street 2000) it would have been useful to include more examples of courses assessed through reflective writing as this may have enabled me to strengthen my theorising of reflective writing.

8.5.2 A tutor perspective

My intention when planning my methodology was to include interviews with tutors directly involved in supporting the students in this study. This proved impossible for two reasons. Students on the foundation course were supported by four different tutors, geographically spread over a very large area. In addition some students' tuition (such as Patricia's) was divided between two tutors, one of whom provided feedback on texts and one of whom delivered tutorials. At the time of undertaking student interviews with 8 participants, it was unfortunately not feasible to also interview these 4 tutors. I

was concerned, however, to interview the practice learning tutor, who was responsible for all the students in this study. Although I did have discussions with this tutor in advance of my study and during my initial meeting with students, he was not able to meet me for an interview. I was sufficiently concerned about the gap that this left in my data that I organised the telephone discussion and anonymous marking exercise outlined in 4.4.7. Despite the fact that this group of tutors were not working directly with the students participating in this study, this discussion resulted in some extremely rich data.

8.5.3 A participatory approach

In planning my methodology I intended to facilitate a high degree of participant involvement in the interview process so that students and tutors could influence the direction of discussion. I drew heavily upon my social work interviewing skills to enable students in particular to talk openly about their (sometimes very difficult) experiences. In planning the timescales of my study, however, I underestimated the importance of building in time for students to be involved in the analysis stage of the process. By the time that I was involved in detailed analysis, I no longer had any contact with student participants and consequently they were not able to comment on the interpretations that I made based on the data they provided.

In chapter 7, for example, I used data from student interviews to offer an interpretation of individual students' talk about their experiences of writing. On reflection I believe I attempted to achieve a good level of participation with participants during the interviews, in the 'here and now'. My approach was

open and honest about my research interests and the purpose of the interviews. My method of interviewing facilitated participants sharing personal and insightful reflections, which resulted in part from the level of trust developed between interviewer and interviewee. I was also careful within interviews to check my understanding of participants' comments at the time, through reflecting back, re-wording and asking for examples. As illustrated by Hall (in Hall and Maharaj, 2001), discussed in 3.5, however, no communicative acts allow an untainted common understanding due to the inevitable cultural and power differences involved. A failure to revisit my interpretations of the data alongside participants will therefore inevitably have reduced the degree of common understanding which might have been achieved. There are however broader issues of interpretation associated with aspects of theoretical perspectives that I drew upon, in particular my use of psychoanalysis, which are discussed in the next section.

8.5.4 Psychoanalytic interpretations

Although I have found the use of psychoanalytically informed analysis of my data a rich and exciting tool, I am also aware that it presents some potentially difficult ethical issues which may conflict with my objective of achieving a participatory approach discussed in 8.5.3. Much psychoanalytic therapeutic analysis relies upon the interpretations of the analyst who is presumed to have greater knowledge and therefore insight than the analysand. This reinforces an already imbalanced power relationship. Lacan (1964), also working within a psychoanalytic frame, rejects the use of interpretation in favour of 'reflecting back' meaning on the basis that Lacan accepts that the analyst is not the only person with knowledge and insight (see 4.9). The

unconscious, in Lacan's terms therefore, drives important and relevant issues to the fore and through verbalising these issues, the analyst brings them to the conscious awareness of the analysand. This is a model of communication which sits more comfortably with the notion of participant involvement in the research process. As researcher, therefore I am able to reflect back the (possibly) unconscious thoughts which are verbalised during an interview. In doing so I offer a point of engagement for the participant; they influence the direction of knowledge seeking through both conscious and unconscious thoughts.

The use of reframing does not, however, compensate for the fact that my methodology did not allow room for participants to see the compiled data and comment on it or participate in analysis. It was only in hindsight that I recognised the potential value of retaining the involvement of my participants for longer, to enable them to participate in the analysis and theorising of my study.

One particular area relating to interpretation that I would have liked to have explored in more detail in my analysis is the operation of the concept of desire (introduced in 3.8.4.1). Without having revisited interviewees or indeed revised the interview methodology substantially I have not considered it appropriate to offer any possible interpretations on the subject of desire in relation to data from individual students. This mismatch between methodology and theorisation arose primarily from my discovery of the work of Henriques et al. (1998) and their use of desire after the completion of my data collection.

8.5.5 Text-level analysis

In this study I have drawn on my prior strengths, such as interviewing skills and my experience of social work practice and education. Although I have developed greater knowledge and awareness of the relationship between texts, identities and learning through this study, I have not developed text-level analysis as a major strand of my methodology. My analysis of the use of first person singular pronouns was the only example of textual analysis that I did pursue, as it was an area highly relevant to my discussion of self in texts. A methodology employing more extensive text-level analysis could have provided greater insight into the nature of reflective writing which might have enabled me to substantiate and clarify the tutors' claim that there was an unwritten 'house style' on the practice learning course. For example it would have been interesting to explore the use of tense, and tense congruence in particular, as this was a feature raised by students themselves, through discourse analysis.

8.5.6 Conflicting roles

My role as a member of academic staff, and indeed line manager of some of the tutors involved in this study, had the potential to blur the researcher role. One particular example related to the potential overlap with a supportive or teaching role with students, a role which several students in this study looked to me for, in some cases directly asking for advice on their writing. 'Support' for the participants was limited, therefore, to the opportunity to talk about their writing, which for some raised issues which they could take up with their tutor or seek clarification on from elsewhere.

In relation to the tutors, although I had wanted to involve the tutors who worked directly with the student participants, there may have been some advantage in not doing so. I was not the line manager of the tutors who participated in the telephone discussion and this may have enabled them to speak more freely about their experiences and expectations of students' writing. However, I acknowledge that this did not remove all potential for the tutors being influenced by my role in the university as a senior member of academic staff.

In addition to these issues I had constraints on my time as a part-time student undertaking my research alongside a full-time post as a teaching academic and mother of a young family. This had implications for both how much time I had available and also when this time fell, which often conflicted with the time colleagues had available to work with me.

8.6 Pedagogical implications

I embarked upon this study on the basis of my interest and concern about the support needs of students writing on social work programmes. I had observed the particular difficulty which many students experienced when undertaking writing which required them to place themselves at the centre of their texts. Consequently I am particularly concerned with the pedagogical implications for the findings arising from this thesis.

8.6.1 Recognising the demands of reflective writing

One of the clearest implications of this thesis is the centrality of reflective writing in social work education. It is a common requirement on all social work

programmes for students to be assessed through written texts on their personal experiences, their values and beliefs and on the ways in which their practice changes and develops, all in the context of theoretically grounded critical discussion. This requirement demands academic writing which is markedly different from the expectations of many disciplines, although it shares some features with other practice-based professional disciplines.

This study has illustrated that the reflective nature of this writing has an impact on the ways in which student texts are constructed (for example the way the content is structured, the use of first person singular pronouns, the integration of theory into narrative) but also on the emotive nature of the content itself. Both aspects generate implications for pedagogic practice.

8.6.2 Naming and teaching reflective writing

In order to clarify expectations of students' writing, it is important for academics responsible for setting assessment guidance to acknowledge the existence of expectations about particular ways of writing for specific academic purposes. In this thesis I have offered the label of 'reflective writing' in order to talk about the nature of writing demanded for a particular purpose in social work education. Once such writing is labelled as distinctive from (for example) the 'essay', as represented by the student texts on the foundation course, it becomes possible to identify specific expectations which distinguish it or define it. The 'house style' becomes public and can be scrutinised.

Closely associated with the naming of expectations is the assumption that students will understand and have the skills to translate guidance into their own writing. Based upon research into essayist literacy (Lillis 2001), it would

seem probable that implicit assumptions could remain even where expectations are made more explicit through written guidance. An alternative approach would be to build in teaching specifically intended to enable the student to understand the expectations of their writing and develop and practice relevant writing skills. For example, in this study students were expected to write about their personal experience and values, evaluate practice undertaken in the workplace and to critically apply theory to practice. In addition, tutors wanted students to integrate theoretical and experiential writing. To achieve this task a number of distinct literacy and cognitive skills are needed, including the ability to construct a narrative based on their own experiences (often involving 'moving' between moments in time) and to build an argument which draws up both examples from personal experience and authoritative sources. These are complex tasks in which, I would suggest, students will need the opportunity to practice and build their skills incrementally, receiving feedback on their writing before major assessment points.

8.6.3. Providing feedback and acknowledging self-disclosure

Tutors and students in this study struggled with the personal and emotive content of reflective writing. This struggle was exacerbated by the fact that this very personal writing was assessed. One solution, as suggested elsewhere (Boud, 1999) would be to exclude this form of writing from formal assessment. This is unlikely to be acceptable within social work education due to the nature of the discipline, its curriculum and professional standards. The explicit teaching of reflective writing skills, however, does open up the possibility of creating a dialogue between students and tutors which explicitly

recognises the social, educational and historical factors which influence individual students' writing practices. Writing tasks involving creating narratives about such experiences can in this way both build trust with tutors through sharing experiences and provide opportunities for unassessed feedback. Skills developed in these preparatory narrative tasks can then be applied to assessed reflective writing tasks.

Tutors also need support and guidance in developing the ability to respond empathically and constructively to texts involving self-disclosure through using communication skills closely associated with social work. The particular challenges of achieving this successfully may mean that a reliance on written feedback alone is unhelpful and that oral dialogue is required to reduce the degree of unhelpful interpretation of meaning. The emotive content along with the complexity of the task suggests that oral dialogue in some form is important in enabling tutors to respond sensitively to the highly emotive nature of the self-disclosures.

8.6.4. The interpersonal aspect of student writing

One of the contributions of this thesis to current work on student writing is the use of a psychosocial lens to look at student writing practices. I have examined the emotional context for student-tutor interaction and this has highlighted the significant impact that both student and tutor identity, along with the nature and context of the writing task, have upon the individual writing practices of the student. The significance of addressivity arose at several points in my data (see 6.4.2 and 6.4.3) illustrating not only that students thought about which particular tutor they were writing for, and adapted

accordingly, but that the identity of the tutor had great significance in their writing. The learning experience for students could have been improved if there had been a greater opportunity to open discussions about individual students' anxieties, needs and expectations but also the particular ways in which they would like to be supported. For some students specific identity issues were extremely important in relation to learning to write academically as well as the content of their writing. Facilitating open discussion about these issues may have therefore enhanced the students' writing skills as well as their understanding of the subject studied. More worryingly, a failure to acknowledge such identity-based barriers could seriously disadvantage particular students who had previous unhelpful educational experiences.

8.6.5 Reflective writing within a spectrum of social work writing

In this thesis I have focused on two forms of student writing which were being used on the programme studied, and are common within the spectrum of assessed writing required of social work students. The challenges posed for both student and tutors by reflective writing demand a clear justification for its value as a pedagogic tool. Such a justification may come from the experience of professional academics writing for social work journals, who have found the genre expected of them limiting and unhelpful, as discussed in 1.6. There is also a question of the extent to which student writing on professional courses, such as social work, prepares students for the writing that they will be expected to participate in once qualified. Figure 11 in 2.4 provides a model for matching writing tasks to both writing and professional skills that such tasks

develop, In this model, reflective writing has a place in the development of an understanding of the self in practice, but this is not necessarily also linked to the development of other academic skills, such as the ability to analyse, develop persuasive arguments or participate in knowledge building. The separation of these areas of skill development into discrete writing tasks may be a way forward for social work educators in order to make professional student writing more accessible and productive.

8.6.6 Identity and non-traditional students

In chapter 1 I identified that the national profile of social work students mapped closely against those groups that might be considered as non-traditional students. At a national level social work students have a high representation of mature women, and a slightly higher representation of black British students, accessing higher education via vocational Access qualifications (see 1.7.1). The sponsored nature of the programme studied slightly distorted this profile in the group studied, resulting in students with more traditional academic qualifications. Issues remain in terms of social work education generally in that social work attracts a disproportionate number of non-traditional students, a group recognised as being potentially disadvantaged in higher education (Lillis, 2001). At the same time this study suggests that this group of students are required by the nature of the national standards set to engage in a particularly problematic form of academic assessment.

8.7 Future work

This study has raised two key areas which offer significant opportunities for future work. The first is the identification of the particular form of assessed reflective writing which is core to all social work education and shares features in common with assessed writing on other vocational programmes, and provides a particular challenge to students and tutors. The second area is the further development of a psychosocial approach to writer identity. The following questions, based represent areas for potentially fruitful further research:

1. What is distinctive about reflective writing, as used in social work education, in terms of the linguistic demands made of students?
2. To what extent can the additional category of 'I as narrator-reflector' be justified?
3. What is the significance of emotion in the creation of and assessment of texts in practice-based education?
4. What contributions could be made to understanding writer identity by a psychosocial perspective?

8.7.1 What is distinctive about reflective writing, as used in social work education, in terms of the linguistic demands made of students?

This study has suggested that this form of reflective writing is particularly problematic for students. Issues identified which do not necessarily apply

more broadly to academic writing include the requirement to write narrative which refers to different moments in time and also the need to combine first person accounts of experience with critical analysis of theory.

8.7.2 To what extent can the additional category of 'I as narrator-reflector' be justified?

Based on student texts in this study, I identified that reflective writing necessitated a use of first person singular pronouns which did not fully fit in with current heuristics such as that of Hyland (2001) or Tang and John (1999). Consequently I have offered the concept of 'I as narrator-reflector' to encompass the use of first person singular pronouns to provide both an account of personal experience and a reflection upon that experience. Although I found this use of first person singular pronouns was consistent within my sample of texts, the size of my sample was small and was based upon only one programme of study. For this term to have any significant validity, therefore, it would be useful to explore it with a larger sample of texts including texts both from social work programmes in other disciplines and from other practice-based programmes also requiring self-disclosure. It would also be valuable to explore in more depth the relationship and possible tensions that exist between the conflated positions of 'narrator' and 'reflector' through an analysis of the verbs following the pronouns. This would also open up the possibility of an exploration of the claim (made by Pamela in 6.4.5) that the practice learning course involved a more complex use of tenses.

8.7.3 What is the significance of emotion in the creation of and assessment of texts in practice-based education?

In this thesis I have observed students expressing the emotional impact that they experienced during the creation and assessment of reflective writing texts in particular. Emotionality is particularly relevant to reflective writing in social work education, but I would suggest that this is not the only area where it has an impact. Further research could usefully build upon the work here to explore the significance of emotion as a factor in not only other forms of writing in social work (including practice writing) but also writing in other practice-based disciplines.

8.7.4 What contributions could be made to understanding writer identity by a psychosocial perspective?

Finally, this study has introduced the idea that a psychosocial perspective is needed in order to explore some important unanswered questions in relation to writer identity. These relate in particular to the importance of emotion (identified above) and the concept of desire (or motivation) in order to make sense of both multiple social identities and the influence of the unconscious. To develop the concept of desire fully in relation to writing practices and identity warrants greater depth of study than this thesis allows. However, the concept appears to offer some fascinating avenues of exploration which may contribute to an understanding of the role played by emotion in determining not only writing practices but the ways in which particular aspects of identity come to the fore. For example, this approach provides a theoretical model for exploring the significance of educational and personal histories to students'

writing practices, including the ways in which they interact with tutors and with specific kinds of writing tasks.

8.8 My research journey

Reflecting on the pedagogic implications of this thesis brings me back to the roots of my own research journey which began as a result of teaching a group of African Caribbean social work students. My primary concern was to identify pedagogic approaches to making writing in social work more accessible for a group of students who I was aware were struggling. Having identified that this particular group of students shared both difficulties in achieving the required standard of academic writing and a common spoken language of Patwa, my initial interest was at the level of identifying non-standard surface features in their writing. Despite my awareness of and interest in the social and emotional impact of the education system on this group of black learners, my initial direction for problem solving lay at the level of surface errors, in the students' texts. In doing so I was drawing on my own prior understanding of study support, derived from working in further and higher education, which could be described as being broadly within the 'skills deficit' model. In other words I was individualising writing problems and looking for solutions which involved filling gaps or supplementing skills at the level of the individual student.

Through the course of working with these and other students, including a small funded project and a pilot study, my determination to understand more about the challenges faced by social work students has led me into the unfamiliar field of academic literacy and student writing. Through this journey I

have come across the work of other researchers who have broadened the lens beyond surface errors of individual students to consider the roles played by institutions and educators such as Lillis (2003), Lea and Stierer (1999, 2000), Baynham (2000). This journey has involved me in exploring alternative framings of academic and, more specifically, student writing. This has enabled me to place student writing in social work within the context of an established body of critical literature which, although entirely new to me, has many resonances with my own disciplinary roots. The clearest resonance has been in relation to post-structuralist theorisation of power, institutions and subjectivity, which underpin anti-discriminatory theories within social work. In relation to approaches to supporting student writing, however, engagement in this new discipline involved a dramatic learning curve.

As a part-time research student who has been teaching throughout the development of this thesis, I have been assimilating these new perspectives whilst teaching. This has enabled me not only to reflect upon applying new ideas to student writing in social work, but also to develop my own teaching practices as I have been learning. The interplay between disciplines has been both a challenging and rewarding experience. This arose from my own frustration with the apparently restrictive sociological lens used to theorise writer identity (Ivanič, 1996). Through attempting to resolve my wish to explore more emotive aspects of student writing, I have returned to my own theoretical roots in my exploration of the contribution that psychology and psychoanalysis could make to theorisation of writer identity. In doing so, I hope to have made a contribution to the research of academic writing by offering a transdisciplinary analysis of a specific practice-based context for

student writing which will stimulate future work. To date this study has been successful in raising the profile of writing within social work education (Rai, 2004, 2006).

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